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THIRTEEN AT TABLE.

THE STORY OF A DINNER THAT WAS NEVER EATEN.



OF A WICKED OLD MAN WHO LIVED DOWN A BY-STREET.

THERE was an old man whose name was White.

They called him Black White, because he was so wicked.

He lived not long ago, not far off—down a by-street out of the Strand—ten years since. He had killed his wife, and been a long while a widower. He was universally hated by all who knew him, and seemed to be as happy an old gentleman as you could well wish to meet with.



By the way, he was seldom met with, for he rarely stirred abroad. When he did so, it was not to pay visits of charity to the poor of the neighbourhood. He was the landlord of many houses in the surrounding courts and alleys, and he sold-up defaulting tenants without mercy. He had made a good deal of money this way, and was very comfortably off.

When he went out it was to attend the courts of law; for he was fre-

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quently bringing actions against one or other of his friends and acquaintances, and sometimes defending an action brought against him by his own lawyer. He believed every one to be a scoundrel, and was always saying so. Sometimes there were actions on this account.

The people round about those parts were mostly in a very poor way; keeping uncommonly small shops, with considerable exertion and much wear and tear for every halfpenny earned. They had not much time, therefore, to trouble themselves about what went on in the world beyond the threshold of their shop-doors. Rumours of war and general rejoicings grew fainter and fainter on their way down this by-street, and were only secondary topics of conversation after the baby-next-door's measles, and Mrs. What's-her-name-over-the-way (poor thing!)'s falling down stairs.

But it was impossible altogether to ignore Black White's existence, because death and quarter-day there's no shirking; and if you had not your money ready when the time came, as sure as you were born, Black White sold you up.

Deputations from outlying alleys, very shabby and shambling, and with a tendency to carry their hands up to their heads whilst speaking, and fidget nervously with their back hair, waited now and then upon Black White, and put matters to him very logically. But Black White's own logic was overwhelming.

'I want my money,' said Black White; 'and I'll have it.'

'Yes, Mr. White, sir, certainly; and so you oughter.'

'Have I a right to what's my own, or haven't I?' asked Mr. White.

'There can't be no question about that there, Mr. White, sir.'

'Then,' said Mr. White, 'I'll have it.' And somehow, at this

point, the deputation's powers of logic failed them, and they retired crestfallen, with long faces.

But occasionally one was found among Mr. White's visitors who plucked up heart, and spoke out; as, for instance:

'My father, sir, is very bad a-bed, and can't go to work; and unless you give us time we can't pay.'

'Then I shall sell you up,' said Mr. White.

'But, please, sir, the loan-office has done that already.'

'I'll have my money, anyhow.'

'But father's got none, sir.'

'Then I'll have his blood.'

'But I don't think he's got any of that either; he's mortal wasted.'

'Then I'll have his skin,' said Mr. White; 'and I'll take his bones in execution.'

Which presently he did, and his debtor died on his hands.

These anecdotes will give you perhaps an unfavourable idea of Mr. White's social qualities; and already, maybe, you have drawn a mental picture of him—gaunt and hard-featured and yellow-skinned. But he was not at all that sort of man. You could not have found a pleasanter face—rosy and smiling. He was rather bald, but what hair he had was brown and curly. He had clear, truthful blue eyes, with an honest steadfast look in them, the more so when he was telling his greatest lies.

He was full of his fun—always at other people's expense. He would even lose money, occasionally, for the sake of a joke. He sometimes made his debtors roar with laughter (they were rather inclined to exaggerate their appreciation of Mr. White's wit and humour when they went to beg time of him); and when they had gone away, holding their sides and drying their eyes, he sent word round to his lawyer to issue execution.

He was born with a fortune, de-

nied himself nothing all his life, and died a gentle death—falling into a nap, as it was thought, one afternoon after a good dinner.

But this is getting on a little too fast. He had one great trouble before he died. He had a son he loved, who quarrelled with him and fled the house. It has been already said that he killed his wife. The evil-tongued in the courts and alleys surrounding were divided as to the means. Some said arsenic, and some strychnine; but he did not kill her that way, he only broke her heart. The recollection of this poor soft-spoken lady lingered long afterwards in the memories of certain oldest inhabitants of the neighbourhood. She gave away small sums by stealth, and did clandestine acts of kindness, and was frequently cheated and imposed upon.

There are some of us in this little company who, when our time comes, will be remembered as soft-hearted fools, who meant well; and others, who are far above such amiable weaknesses, who will not be remembered at all; and some again who will get wrongly labelled at the cemetery. When Black White was buried, all the virtues were inscribed upon his tombstone, at his own expense.

He had been very cruel to his wife while she lived, but he loved his son dearly. The latter grew up a light-hearted, reckless young vagabond, who had always lots of money and friends at his disposal. Except that he was liberal enough with the cash which cost him no trouble to get, it would have been a little difficult perhaps to find much to say in the young man's favour. The providers of unlimited treats evoke but small gratitude from the recipients of their bounty. It is a melancholy ambition to be a jolly fellow, and the cost is considerable.

Young White, however, did not care much what any one thought

of him. He ate, drank, and made merry; and when he had the time to spare, spent an hour or two with the old man. This son of Black White's was well known in the neighbouring courts and alleys, through which he swaggered and smoked; and his somewhat sallow and heavy face was tolerably familiar to the frequenters of various haunts of dissipation in the metropolis. The old man thought him one of the finest and handsomest young gentlemen alive.

But he was not. There were many opinions current regarding him, and but few in his favour. Nor was he grateful for the kindly views the old man took of his shortcomings, for he found the old man's society rather dull. Those famous jokes of which mention has been made he yawned at unrestrainedly. Perhaps, after all, the mirth of the needy debtors was a little forced; but then how could they afford to offend the joker?

Young White could, however, or thought so. Therefore he made no effort to show that he did not appreciate his father's humour. He took his money as a matter of course, squandered it with liberality, and came for more, which the old man handed over without a murmur.

And this state of things had existed for a long while, when one day Dick White asked for more, and the old man refused him.

It was one Christmas morning, and certain members of the White family were expected, according to custom, to dinner in the evening. The old man was generally in high spirits on these occasions, for the relations were very humble, and he could insult them to his heart's content with the greatest impunity. But to-day he was out of sorts, for various reasons.

In the first place, his lawyer, against whom he had lately brought an action, had gained the day and

got heavy damages. In the second, two defaulting debtors had got the best of him; and, in the third, the humblest of the humble relations, at whose expense he had prepared several very cutting sarcasms, had written to say he could not come.

While the old man was reading the letter of apology, young White came in and asked for more money.

'I've none in the house.'

'Write me out a cheque, then; I can get it discounted.'

'I've none to spare.'

'But I must have it.'

'But you can't.'

'What the deuce do you mean?'

Father and son stood staring at each other in silent amazement after this little dialogue; but of the two perhaps the son was the most surprised, for, indeed, how could he be expected to understand such unreasonable behaviour on the part of a parent?

'I don't know whether you know it,' he cried at last, trying all he could to be calm, but boiling over with virtuous indignation nevertheless; 'if you don't let me have the money, you'll put me to serious inconvenience.'

'And I don't know whether you know it, Dick,' responded his father; 'but you're an impertinent scoundrel, and this is my house, and I'll thank you to talk a little more respectfully, or to go about your business.'

'You won't have the trouble of telling me that twice,' said his cruelly-treated child. 'I shall never darken your doors again.'

'I'm glad of that,' replied the old gentleman with a chuckle. 'Go somewhere else, my boy, where you'll be treated better.'

And then he took a pinch of snuff; and Dick, scarlet with wrath, stamped out of the room, down stairs, and out at the street-door, which he banged to behind him with a great crash.

And he never came back any more.

The old man sat anxiously expecting him for full a couple of hours, and then began to fidget. They had never quarrelled before this. The son was hasty tempered, and had often indulged in petty outbursts; but the old man had laughed off these little storms, and bought back sunshine with a few gold pieces.

'He'll be back to dinner,' he said. 'Christmas-day, too! He's sure to come back to dinner.'

Why old Mr. White should have chosen all at once to take this sentimental view of the festive season, it is difficult to say. As a rule, it had been his habit rather to ridicule such absurdities; but he did not notice this inconsistency just at the moment.

He waited throughout the day, hoping each knock at the door would announce the return of the contrite Dick; but he was doomed to disappointment. Dick, still labouring under the deepest sense of injury, had no intention of coming back.

The dinner was served, and the humble relations plied their knives and forks assiduously. The old man's tongue was not wagging as freely as usual at their expense, and presently even the most timid took heart of grace and cracked their little jokes.

'But, goodness me, Mr. White!' one lady said for the fourth time, 'wherever is Mr. Richard all this while?'

The old man had fallen into a thoughtful mood, and sat with his chin resting on his hand. He started up at this reiterated inquiry, and turned savagely upon the little company.

'What does it matter to you, ma'am, where he is?' he cried. 'He's left my house for good, and I never want to see his face again. Will

you please to leave his name alone, and mind your own business?

Of course she would. She had no intention of interfering in affairs which did not concern her. She was very sorry to hear that Mr. Richard had displeased his father, that was all.

'You're not, you old hypocrite! You lie—you know you do!' thundered Black White, striking the table with his fist. 'The whole lot of you lie—you do! You'd like me to go on quarrelling, and cut the fellow out of my will, and leave my money to be divided among you.'

'No, no, Mr. White!' broke in a humble relative with a sense of humour; 'you are too hard upon us!'

'Hold *your* tongue!' roared Black White, thumping the table for the second time. At which reproof the humble relative addressed shrivelled up, as it were, and spoke no more. 'I'm not joking,' he went on. 'Do you suppose I don't know why you come here, the lot of you? I've told you as much over and over again; and to what I said before I'll now add this: I'd rather have your room than your company.'

Some of the most spirited of the humble relatives here rose, and made as though they would quit the room in indignation; but Black White imperatively waved them back to their seats.

'You'd better stop,' he said, 'and eat your dinner, as you've come for it; but you needn't come again till I send for you. You needn't be afraid, though, that, when I die, I shall not keep the promises I have made. You'll have your legacies, and more; because, if that boy Dick doesn't come back to fetch his share, you'll have that too. And now eat up your dinners, and when you've eaten, go. I don't want any myself.'

And so, without another word, he left them staring at one another, and very much surprised.

It got about among the courts and alleys that something singular had come to Black White. He wasn't at all the same; he began to neglect his business; he allowed two or three defaulting debtors to get right off with their goods and chattels, and took no trouble about pursuing them. He very rarely cracked jokes.

About this time, too, he lost a couple of hundred pounds in the stupidest way you ever heard of money being lost; at least, that was Black White's legal adviser's view of the transaction.

There was a relation of Black White's who was not quite as humble as the rest—who was not, to tell the truth, humble at all, and did not make one of the Christmas company alluded to. This was the old man's brother, with whom he had quarrelled some years ago, and for whom, when he mentioned him at all, Black White was heard to express the most sovereign contempt. This brother had been well-to-do, but had lately made some unlucky speculations. He wanted money, and went to a money-lender. He could not keep his engagement, and went to another. Presently he had got to be pretty well known in money-lending circles, and found some difficulty in negotiating a fresh loan. When affairs had reached this point, he made the acquaintance of Black White's lawyer, who said he might get something done for him through a party that he knew of.

There were no names mentioned. The party was consulted, and agreed to advance the money; but when the would-be borrower found out that it was his own brother he was to be indebted to, he indignantly refused the loan.

Black White's lawyer brought back the message with a chuckle, and repeated it with pardonable elaboration, for Black White never missed an opportunity of telling *him* unpleasant truths. But, strange to say, the old man was not half as angry as he expected.

'If he won't have it from me,' he said, 'you must lend it him under another name.' And thus the money was lent.

When the time arrived for repayment, Black White's lawyer came to Black White and said, 'I've been making inquiries, and I don't expect that two hundred will be forthcoming. Shall I follow it up sharp?'

'No; give time.'

'How much is he to pay for it?'

'Nothing.'

The day of payment came, and Black White's brother came with an excuse. Another day was fixed, and he came again with another excuse, and asked for more time still.

The lawyer asked what he should do then.

'Give it,' said Black White.

But even when the second period had expired the payment was just as impossible as before. The brother did not call this time, but sent his daughter with a note. Black White was there. He took the letter from the young lady's hand, and read it.

'Papa is very unwell, or he would have called himself.'

She spoke rather haughtily, for it was a shabby little office, and the old man was shabby also.

'Does your papa owe much money?' he asked.

'I know nothing about his affairs,' she replied more haughtily still. 'I suppose what he owes he will pay. Have you any message for him?'

'No,' said Black White thoughtfully; 'unless, indeed, it is that if

he wants any more and will call on me, I'll perhaps be able to let him have it.'

When the brother got this message, he suddenly grew quite well again, and putting on his hat, set out to see what could be done. But halfway to the office he came to a standstill, and asked himself whether he ought not to be cautious. Probably this was a trap the lawyer was setting for him. Why? That he could not answer; but yet he felt no doubt it was a trap. Therefore, reaching the office and finding a juvenile clerk there left in charge, he very artfully made inquiries, and learnt to his dismay that it was Black White's money he had had.

He came home in a terrible state of mind. He was a ruined man. He saw it all clearly. That deep-dyed miscreant had him in his power, and wished to drag him still farther into the toils. He wrote that night, refusing the second loan, and telling his brother he was prepared for the worst.

Some weeks passed by without this worst arriving; but it was shortly to come. The other creditors were not so forbearing as that rapacious usurer White. Presently they swept down upon him all at once. Ruin stared him in the face, and despair took possession of his soul. One morning the first ray of dawning day stole in round the window-blind of the poor gentleman's bedroom and fell upon a very white face, and a wasted hand clutching a small bottle convulsively. Some hours later, when the door was broken open, it was found that Black White's brother had made away with himself.

'Is there any chance of his estate realising anything?'

'Not a ghost of a chance.'

'There's only one child, is there?'

'There's that fine young lady who snubbed you so that day in my office.'

'What's to become of her?'

'What becomes of the generality of young ladies left destitute under similar circumstances? The prospect isn't a very bright one.'

'I suppose not.'

That night Black White went himself and found out the young lady's address, and said to her:

'My dear child, I'm your uncle. I daresay you've heard me spoken of as a horrible old ruffian. I didn't mean to behave badly to your father though, if he would only have believed me. You must believe me instead. I have no children of my own. You must come home and be my daughter.'

When the lawyer heard what had happened, he said, 'The old wretch is growing maudlin.'

Indeed, he grew very maudlin after this. The old woman who had kept house for him for the last twenty years, and who had never had a kind word from him all the time, said she could not think what on earth there was amiss.

There must have been something though. He used to stand many hours together gazing from the window on to a dreary little patch of garden-ground which lay between his house and the river. Of a night he would sit in front of the fire and gaze as steadfastly into the smouldering embers. Sometimes his niece thought he had gone to sleep. Once he was

sitting so motionless she was afraid he was dead; but approaching him closer, she saw his lips moving gently, and two tear-drops resting on his cheeks, on which the fire-light glistened.

He left off taking any interest in business matters, and his legal adviser, having it all his own way, conducted his affairs in his stead with unwavering ferocity, so that the name of Black White grew blacker than ever; and it was said that his life was not safe down some of those courts and alleys round about.

But one day the old man died, and everybody said, 'A good job too;' except, perhaps, that young girl whom he had taken in out of charity, and who may have grown to love him just a little.

He died on Christmas-day, five years from the date of his son's departure. After his death, the humble relatives—humble no longer, for there was no occasion for humility—got each a letter from the legal adviser summoning them to attend punctually one month from that date, at six in the evening, to receive their share of the old man's money, with the somewhat strange proviso that absentees would get nothing.

You may be sure there was a rush, and it was a hard matter, too, for some of the relatives to be in time, for they came from all parts of the world at a moment's notice.

It is with their adventures on the way that we have now to do.

OF THE FIRST OLD LADY WHO TRAVELLED WITH A GHOST.



MRS. EARNSHAW.

'ARE you going to let him have this credit, Rachel?'

'I was thinking about it.'

'Thinking about it! I don't see that it requires much thought. It's a simple question of yes or no.'

'Well, yes, then.'

'Then you'll regret it every day of your life.'

'I don't see how.'

'The deuce you don't! but I tell you you will.'

'You are prejudiced, Stephen. The boy seems honest and sincere enough.'

'Seems, does he? with his nasty

canting ways. I tell you what it is, Rachel, there's not a drop of honest English blood in him—the deceitful sneak!'

'If I were you, Stephen Earnshaw, I wouldn't speak so of my own flesh and blood—it isn't creditable. He couldn't help his mother making a fool of herself and marrying a Frenchman. The lad's our own nephew, say what you will about it.'

'That's no reason he should ruin us.'

'He isn't going to ruin us.'

'He will, if you let him go on as he is doing.'

'I don't believe it; but you never liked him from the beginning!'

'No, I didn't, and never shall.'

'Then more shame to you.'

Old Mrs. Earnshaw was vexed and angry; her brother-in-law—Stephen Earnshaw—was vexed and angry; and the cause of their mutual annoyance was Louis Delbarre their nephew, Mrs. Earnshaw's protégé.

He was the son of her late husband's sister; who, when a pretty girl of seventeen, had eloped with a Frenchman, and had never been heard of till her sole representative, M. Louis, turned up one fine day at Earnshaw Nest, and startled the quiet inmates by claiming a relationship with them.

He stated that his father and mother had both been dead some years; that he had been employed

in a mercantile house in Lyons, but falling into pecuniary difficulties had been obliged to relinquish his situation and come over to England, in the hope that some of his mother's rich relations would do something for him.

His story was plausible, his deportment pleasing and elegant; and old Mrs. Earnshaw, who had no children of her own, felt her heart warm towards the fascinating young Frenchman, who quickly ingratiated himself into her good graces by his politeness and deference to all her wishes.

Louis Delbarre impressed everyone who saw him with a favourable opinion. His free frank manners, his gay insouciant bearing, won the esteem of all except Stephen Earnshaw, his own uncle.

This man, now well on in years, had for some time managed the estate of his rich sister-in-law as a sort of steward, besides superintending to a great extent the wholesale house of business in London, from which she derived most of her revenue. He was her factotum and general adviser, her servant and yet her friend. His language was very bluff at times, for he never disguised his feelings in any way; and he set his face from the first against the young man, whom he designated as an adventurer, as a French spy, or agent of some secret society.

Not all the efforts of Louis Delbarre could ever win more than a grunt from the stubborn old Englishman, who expressed in no measured terms his unconcealed aversion to the young Frenchman's ways and conduct.

He possessed the good old-fashioned dislike to smoking, and when on some occasions he had met Louis coming out of a billiard-saloon accompanied by a man of anything but reputable character, he at once acquainted Mrs. Earn-

shaw with the fact, warning her against the danger she incurred by having such a man about the house. Louis, however, told his version of the affair, representing matters in such a way, that Mrs. Earnshaw believed her brother-in-law was in reality jealous of his foreign nephew, and only wanted to set her against him in order to have him out of the way.

Mrs. Earnshaw was obstinate, however (all old women are); she had taken a fancy, and she didn't mean to let a trifle interfere with it.

Delbarre tried all he could to dispel the suspicions of his uncle. He proved his willingness to work, by imploring Mrs. Earnshaw to give him any situation she chose; and expressed his determination never to be a dependent on her bounty, but to earn for himself his own position. On more than one occasion he gave ample proof of his energy and activity; and the heart of the good old lady was touched by his evident anxiety to please her. But he could not please Stephen Earnshaw: he bore with his cross crotchety ways; consulted him on all occasions; laughed at his cool sarcasms, as though they were simply *jeux-d'esprit* that called for his admiration; yet try as he might, he couldn't conciliate the old man, who never gave him a civil answer if he could possibly help it, but alternately watched and avoided him, and had always something disagreeable to oppose to all his schemes.

Poor Mrs. Earnshaw didn't lead an easy life between the pair, whom she gladly would have seen friends. Stephen, her friend and counsellor, was as necessary to her as her own existence. Never an angry word had passed between them till the advent of the young foreigner. And now Stephen was morose and taciturn; while Mrs. Earnshaw showed

she was still mistress of the firm by her determination not to discard her nephew at any cost.

Certainly she seemed to have justice on her side. No evil or treachery could possibly lurk behind the honest open brow, the laughing blue eyes, of Louis Delbarre; no perfidy in the soft sweet tones of that low *trainante* voice, the warm flexile grasp of those small slender fingers.

There were those who said that when the Frenchman thought himself alone, a black scowl rested on his usually smooth forehead, a lurid light crept into his glittering eyes, and his long lithe fingers laced and interlaced as though they grasped something unseen. These were but the disordered imaginations of those whose minds were warped by the prejudices and opinions of his uncle, whose rough uncongenial manners had nothing in common with the delicate refined politeness of the Frenchman.

So Louis Delbarre held his own, and was promoted to the post of confidential clerk in the firm of Earnshaw, Earnshaw, & Co., wholesale merchants of Cannon-street, City.

He soon proved he was not undeserving the trust reposed in him. By his pleasing address and punctuality he won the confidence of many substantial men; while his ample knowledge of business in regard to foreign relations, and his facility in foreign correspondence, being acquainted with two or three languages besides his own, made him a great acquisition.

Mrs. Earnshaw was delighted; the connection was extended, funds flowed in from all quarters; while Louis Delbarre, never appearing to presume on his talent, remained nearly always in town, pleading that anxiety about business kept him from Earnshaw Nest.

Stephen Earnshaw heard some

rumours about racehorses, and a pretty ballet-girl kept a short distance from town; but he failed to prove anything against his nephew. The managers reported him diligent and attentive. Reading, the nearest station to Earnshaw Nest, was a long way out of town; and the surly old yeoman was obliged to content himself with growling whenever he returned from a visit to the house in London, or whenever Louis ventured down there.

So things continued for some considerable time, when M. Delbarre arrived in great haste to consult his aunt as to the advisability of giving a large amount of credit to a firm in Lyons, with whom they had already had some very extensive dealings.

Louis first introduced the firm to their notice, having been acquainted with it when in Lyons; he represented it as doing by far the largest trade in that mercantile city, and declared that the giving of large and long credit to such a firm must result in their own advantage.

Stephen Earnshaw opposed him strenuously. They had connection enough, he said, with English houses, without seeking to extend it; and he objected vehemently to any further risk being run.

The dispute ended in a tiff between him and his sister-in-law; while Louis, who for the first time threw out a hint that the old man had some stronger motive in the background for his opposition, returned to London master of the situation.

A month afterwards the house of Earnshaw was again in confusion. A telegram arrived to the effect that the firm in Lyons had failed, leaving them debtors to the amount of twenty thousand pounds.

The panic this caused can be more easily imagined than describ-

ed. Old Mrs. Earnshaw took to her bed. Stephen swore, stormed, and fumed; while young Delbarre seemed overwhelmed with grief—especially as he was the cause of so much credit being given so short a time before the failure.

They never retrieved the damage. Unable to meet the demands of their own creditors, and obliged to beg for time, thereby losing the confidence of their customers, the house of Earnshaw, Earnshaw, & Co. went slowly but surely to the bad.

Mrs. Earnshaw sold her estate, and went to live in a small house at Camberwell. She retrenched in every way she could; but it was with great difficulty, so Louis stated, that they could prevent the shutters being closed and the firm of Earnshaw declared bankrupt.

At this juncture, Gordon, one of the eldest clerks, died suddenly; his books were found to be full of artful frauds, false entries, and bad debts. He was a man in whom Stephen Earnshaw had reposed great trust; and bitter was the chagrin of the bluff Englishman when he was shown the defalcations. It was Louis's turn to sneer now, if he had been so minded; but he contented himself with observing to his aunt that her eyes would be open soon to sights she little expected.

Things went on in this unsatisfactory way for some time, when one day Stephen Earnshaw ran against an old schoolfellow and early chum, whom he hadn't seen for years.

Mr. Abbots had lived the greater part of his life abroad; England was almost a new country to him; and he and Earnshaw went into the coffee-room of the Golden-cross Hotel, to discuss, over a bottle of wine, the various pranks Fortune had played with them.

Stephen told his friend the story

of his troubles, in which Mr. Abbots deeply sympathised, being a mercantile man himself; and then he, in his turn, recounted the large successes and fortune he had made, especially in the silk trade.

'And where have you done all this, old fellow?' questioned Earnshaw.

'In Lyons, where I have been resident for years.'

'In Lyons? Good God! that's where the firm was that has ruined us.'

'Indeed! May I ask the name?'

'Clements and Morel. The scoundrels bolted, goods and all.'

'Clements and Morel? You are under a delusion, my friend. There is no such firm as Clements and Morel in Lyons, nor has there ever been.'

'O, but there is. We have their acceptances for the whole amount.'

'I beg your pardon, Earnshaw,' replied Mr. Abbots; 'for I am acquainted with every firm in the place; and I tell you there has never been such a name as Clements and Morel.'

An inkling of the truth seemed to dawn on Stephen's mind. He wiped his brow with his handkerchief, gazed at Mr. Abbots for a while in silence, then gasped out,

'Are you—are you sure?'

'Quite sure. I'd stake my life on it.'

'Then,' exclaimed Earnshaw, thumping his stick vehemently on the ground,—'then, by Heaven, there's been foul play! I knew it all along. Don't say a word, Abbots. I'll be off by to-night's mail. There's some villany to be cleared up here.'

He sent a hurried note to Camberwell, begging his sister-in-law not to alarm herself, as he had merely run over to France for a few days on business.

Such an unusual proceeding on his part, however, excited the old

lady's apprehension, and filled her with consternation. She sent at once for Louis Delbarre, to see if he knew what it all meant. Louis, however, was as much in the dark as herself.

'He's gone mad, Louis!' she cried, wringing her hands. 'Trouble and worry have turned his brain. To think of Stephen Earnshaw at his time of life venturing alone among the Parly-vous! What ever can it all mean?'

'He had better have taken some one with him,' said Louis, with a faint smile. 'What do you think, my dear aunt, if I follow him, and bring him home?'

'O Louis, by all means do!' exclaimed the excited old lady. 'Don't waste a moment, there's a dear boy. I shall be in agony till you both come back.'

Louis Delbarre seemed as anxious as she was for him to be off. And Mrs. Earnshaw lent him a large cloak of her late husband's, as the nights would be very cold, especially on the sea.

He waved his light straw hat gaily to her as he passed out of the garden-gate, bidding her keep up her spirits, for all would yet be well; her last look beaming kindly on his handsome form and face, the parting sunlight resting on his golden hair. Very dear had the young man become to the childless woman during the years of their acquaintance. She had forgiven him all the past. She only saw the boy she loved; the man she hoped would yet retrieve their fallen fortunes.

A few days later the papers were full of a terrible murder committed in France. The body of a man, horribly mutilated and utterly unrecognisable, was found in a railway-carriage on the Lyons route, but no trace of the assassin could be discovered.

On the body of the murdered

man was a letter addressed by Mrs. Earnshaw to Louis Delbarre, the only clue they had to his identity; and when a short time afterwards it was placed in her hands, together with the cloak she herself had fastened round his neck, and the straw-hat that he wore, now crushed and torn, the grief of the poor woman knew no bounds, and for a while she was lost to consciousness.

Dead! in the prime of his youth and life. Dead! murdered on the journey he had taken at her bidding. The boy she loved so dearly, the hope of her declining years!

It was long before she recovered from the effects of the fearful shock—a shock great enough to have caused her own death.

But, bitter as was her grief, it was made yet more bitter by the continued absence of her brother-in-law.

Not a word or sign came from the man who had left her in her trouble, with scarcely a clue to his whereabouts. A terrible suspicion haunted her mind, growing at last into a stern reality. What if the hints dropped by Louis were true? If the man she had trusted had been really robbing her all along, and had left her to enjoy his spoil in a distant land?

If so, then that fully accounted for his dislike to Louis, his anxiety not to let him have anything to do with the accounts, as sooner or later he would be sure to find him out.

The clerk who died was hand-and-glove with Stephen, who must have been aware of the false entries in the books. Yes! he had evidently fled with the proceeds of his robbery—but where? The journey to France might be only a pretext; Australia or America were far more likely. Search was made—rewards offered for his discovery—but all

in vain; he was never heard of more. And the weary years rolled on over the plundered widow's head, bringing her slowly but surely to the grave.

As she grew older she became stranger and more eccentric in her habits. Never at any time liking to be thwarted, she would bear no contradiction now. At times moody and silent, at times excitable and imperious, she was ever dwelling on the story of her wrongs, which she recited to every new-comer. At last some one told her that a man, answering in every way the description of her brother-in-law, was living at Clermont Ferrand, near Lyons; that he was reported to be very rich, but would make friends with nobody.

There had been so much mystery about the matter—the failure of the Lyons firm, the fraudulent clerk, the disappearance of Stephen, and the terrible death of the poor boy Louis—that she determined to go to Lyons herself, and learn the truth as far as she could. It was vain to dissuade her; not even the bitter winter, cold as it was, could turn her from her scheme. She was too poor to take a maid; but in her early married days she had often been to Paris with her husband, and gained a tolerable knowledge of the French language and railroads. Alone and unprotected, on a freezing January morn, she set out on her weary journey.

Arrived at Lyons, she found, to her horror and amazement, that the firm of Clements and Morel had never existed except in imagination. Overcome and bewildered by varied reports and perplexities, she searched through Puy de Dôme and Clermont Ferrand in vain for any trace of Stephen Earnshaw. From town to town, from village to village, she went; then she heard that an Eng-

lishman was living near Geneva, who appeared from the description to be the missing man.

Nothing daunted, she determined to go to the Lutheran city, and was arranging to leave the hotel when a letter was placed in her hands covered with various stamps and post-marks—a letter that had followed her into almost every place, lying for some days at different hotels, where she had designed to stop.

The letter was from a lawyer, who stated that her brother White, whom she had long supposed to be dead, had only just died, leaving an immense sum of money to be divided amongst his relatives. She, as one of the next of kin, was entitled to a share, which she would lose if not present in London on a certain day named in the letter.

This was enough to startle any one's nerves. Such an unexpected windfall of good fortune she never anticipated; but the condition to be fulfilled—she looked at the date of the letter; it wanted only two days to the time when she must be in London. Travel as fast as she could, she could barely do it. Trembling with excitement, she determined for the time at least to give up her present quest, and to return home by the first train from Lyons to Paris.

It was a bright clear morning when she left the fair city of Lyons, and being the only passenger in her compartment, she amused herself with gazing out at the country as they flew along. Snow lay in patches on the broad green fields and crowned the summits of the Jura Alps. The snowy crests glistened and scintillated in the morning sun, raising their lofty peaks into the blue cloudless sky.

As the train flew along on the banks of the Saône, the great wide river glittered like a silver ribbon through the willow-trees; while the

hills of the Côte d'Or, studded with innumerable white châteaux and picturesque little villages, gleamed reddish gold as the sunlight fell upon them. Very fair looked the beautiful land of France, though in her winter dress; the green of the fields seemed like velvet even now, and the snow, like ermine, bordered the edges of her robe.

They flew past Macon, where the now-deserted vineyards gave promise of the time when their rich luxuriance would be studded with the deep purple of the grape. Through flat uninteresting plains, through an open chalky country, through cuttings where precipitous rocks overhung the deep gorge, shutting the daylight almost out. Past the mountains of Auvergne, up whose arid slopes the desolate vineyards looked cold and drear beneath the wintry sky. Past Sens, its grand cathedral looming against the sky; the clear-cut perfect Gothic lines standing out in bold relief. Past Châlons-sur-Saône, with its Abbaye of St. Marcel.

And now the day declines; the sun retires behind the cold gray clouds; the shadows fall on the mountain sides, wrapping in impenetrable gloom the ruined castles that crown every steep like monuments of ancient feudal times.

Out again into the open country, where field after field of tall dank grass is bounded by shivering willow-trees; and rows of tall Lombardy poplars, like white-sheeted ghosts, bend their ghastly spectre-like forms in the breeze.

Puffing and smoking flies the iron horse, with a shriek like that of an evil spirit. And now they enter the pleasant valley of Pont-sur-Yonne, its green banks fringed with graceful trees, châteaux and villages studding every slope.

It was here, at this station, that the body of the murdered Louis

was discovered. In that pretty churchyard he was laid, with the shadow from the spire falling softly on his grave. Tears dimmed Mrs. Earnshaw's eyes as she gazed out of the train. O, if he had but lived to enjoy with her the good fortune that had overtaken her! Her memory went back to the past—the past, when they might have been so happy. As vivid as if only yesterday came the recollection of that fearful time, when all her hopes were crushed by her brother's treachery and Louis's cruel death.

Thinking of it all, she grew dreamy and tired. The journey had been very long and wearying to her aged limbs. Overcome with sorrow and fatigue, she leant back against the cushions and dropped into a sleep.

But even then her imagination would not allow her to rest in peace; her slumbers were disturbed by her painful thoughts. The face of the murdered man rose before her vision, ghastly and pale, bidding her avenge his death. She started and moaned, and could not sleep; a horrible oppression seemed to choke her—a strange sensation as of something unearthly caused her to open her eyes. As she gradually unclosed them, she became aware that she was no longer alone. A form, first indistinct, then horribly real, occupied the seat opposite to her, its eyes fixed on her face.

How It got there she did not know; of how long she had slept, or where she was, she was utterly unconscious. But there It sat, that fearful shape, still and quiet, but awfully distinct in the waning daylight. And the eyes—cold, blue, glittering—were the eyes of her dead nephew. A shudder passed over her frame; a cold sweat broke out on her forehead. Yet she sat still, fascinated, breathless, glaring at the spectre.

As reason began to assert itself, and her half-dazed mind to comprehend the situation, she thought, 'Why should she fear him dead, to whom she had been so kind when living? If that awful something was indeed he, what had she to fear?' Yet it was he without doubt; the fair light hair hung over the marble brow in the way she knew so well; but no smile lurked round the handsome mobile mouth; it looked cruel and compressed, as the light flitted across it. Its eyes, cold and steely now, wore a lurid murderous glare.

Her heart throbbed audibly; but Mrs. Earnshaw was a brave woman in spite of her age, and she would speak to it, whatever it was.

'Louis!'

Horror of horrors! The spectre started from its seat. It was no impalpable form, but a living breathing man. It was Louis; but Louis alive and well. Who, then, was the murdered man?

The truth flashed on her. It was her brother-in-law, who had been murdered, and Louis had disguised him in his cloak, in order to escape detection.

Quick as thought she flung herself upon him, grasping him round the neck. Warm soft flesh met her grasp.

'Thief! murderer!' she cried, 'I've got you! Villain, I know all; you sha'n't escape me now.'

She clung, with all her might and main, to the collar of his coat; but the ghost was too strong for her.

With one blow and a hissed-out curse he felled her back into her seat, and another stroke might have silenced her for ever; but, with a shriek and a yell, the engine rushed into the station of Montereau. Like a tiger-cat she flew at him again.

'Murder! Police! Police!' she cried, as the gens-d'armes rushed to the window of the carriage and dragged them both out, she still clinging to his coat. 'Fools! dolts!' she exclaimed to the bewildered Frenchmen; 'where is your skill? Here is the wretch you supposed to be murdered, but who killed my brother and wrapped his body in my late husband's cloak that I lent him.'

In vain the malefactor struggled, hound and reptile that he was, to free himself from his captors' hands. A short time sufficed to lodge him in the public prison; while the prefect of police took down the excited old lady's story.

They bound her over to appear against Louis Delbarre at the criminal tribunal; and the Maire—a kind-hearted old man, full of compassion for her story, and admiration of her intrepidity and courage—himself gallantly offered to accompany her to London.

[Of what befell her when she arrived there, the reader will be informed farther on. Meanwhile we have to deal with Mr. Toplady's travelling experiences.]

OF THE MAN WHO TRAVELLED IN HIS OWN COFFIN.



MR. TOPLADY.

THE town of Dudgeley is pretty familiar to the travelled eye—one that is slowly passing from a sort of old country-town cocoon into the dapper, showy, butterfly stage of the bustling railway city. The old fossil of an inn, where the coaches used to stop and 'change,' and where the lord and baronets of the district used to dine at 'size time, had been rudely shouldered aside—elbowed, as it were, into the almshouse—by the flaring, 'splashy,' noisy railway-hotel, where there was a company, a manager,

and a lift. And this substitution was but a type of the human 'elbowing aside' that went on: the old country attorney being 'tripped-up' by a go-ahead practitioner; the old humdrum parson by a soft and silvery preacher, who floated-in on the sweet and scented waters of Ritualism; the old traders being driven out by young and rapid merchants; and very lately 'old Todd,' who had brought into the world half the genteel children of the county, and had set one bone at least in the body of every hunting-man, was now being seriously threatened by a bright and gorgeous practitioner, who had one morning appeared in the place, taken and furnished a handsome house, and was seen careering through the streets in a brougham whose panels shone like looking-glasses. The owner, framed inside, wore jewelry, and was scented. The first day he had the air of practice; at least he seemed to be driving about, and even to be letting himself out at hall-doors, looking at a note-book, &c., though no particular patient could say *he* had been visited. The name of this shining and brilliant medical adviser was Redman—Charles Redman, M.D., F.R.C.S.E. and I., Cor. Mem. of R.A.S., &c.; in short, the usual medical gold fringe of mysterious lettering, which is an absolute necessity to getting on. The result of the apparition was curiosity at first; secondly, gratifi-

cation of this curiosity. One said to the other, 'Who has been attending you? What, old Todd?' (Smile of pity.) 'We have Dr. Redman, who is *charming*. Such skill too! Refused his fee on the second and third visit, saying he only came as a friend. Very different from that greedy old Todd.' Comparisons of this sort are particularly odious, and also fatal. Dr. Redman could also talk about a Lady Mary.

The remark about 'that greedy old Todd' had been made by a member of the community known as Mr. Silas Toplady, an old attorney supposed to have money, and spoken of in the handsome terms invariably used to those who choose to take care of that article. These metaphors seem drawn from a carpenter's tool-chest: he was an 'old file,' an 'old screw,' a 'gritty old saw,' a 'mean shaver and parer,' a 'cruel chisel.' He lived by himself, an expression faulty, as expressing his choice in the matter; whereas the truth was no one could be paid to live with him. He was not exactly one of the typical crusty and rusty misers of the Scrooge mould, but had a knowing and self-satisfied air about him. Neither was he of the traditional age and mouldiness; but he was certainly in the worst health and preservation. He was said to be 'as rich as a Jew,' 'rolling in gold,' 'stuffed with bank-notes'—an embodiment, in short, of all those curious and rather unnatural processes which popular admiration attaches to wealth. Every one had this *carte-de-visite* of 'old Toplady,' as seen every night at seven o'clock in the old mouldy coffee-room of the decaying Crown, where he came for his 'twopenn'orth o' gin-a'-wharter;' a thin, short, shrunk man, with a tail-coat exactly as high-collared as it was short-waisted; and

whose trousers were short-legged. Over his head hung his chimney-pot hat, always on the same peg. There his manner was to talk to every stranger on his first appearance; though if that stranger spoke to him cheerfully on their second meeting, he delighted in repulsing him with some remark like, 'I think, sir, you and I have not the pleasure of being acquainted.' The annoyed stranger would sometimes answer: 'God forbid, you curmudgeon!' But old Toplady, though he was only fifty-odd, would chuckle, and use his favourite phrase: 'I put *that* in his pipe!' His coughs, and the sounds of the deranged machinery that accompanied them, with its efforts to get into gear again, were highly unpleasant to the bystanders; but he would never have medical advice, as too costly, and seemed to revel in his coughs and expectoral accompaniments.

The go-ahead Doctor being now established in his new go-ahead house, with magnificent go-ahead furniture, a go-ahead wife, who was 'fine,' with daughters, almost at once became curious about this singular medical parishioner. This was the pleasant name he gave his patients. He called on him—which of course produced no result. Then he happened to be in the coffee-room of the Crown about the hour when old Toplady was having his gin-and-water; and it was then seen that there was a link between the fine, smooth, agreeable, go-ahead Doctor—abstraction made of his clothes and jewelry—and the old miser—abstraction made of *his* clothes, which might have been an advantage to the parish.

On the next night the Doctor was there, by an accident; and accosted the old miser, with great interest as to his health. The other, greatly relishing the oppor-

c

tunity, made his accustomed reply, with a sort of chuckle,

'I think, sir, you and I have not the honour of being acquainted?'

But the fluent Doctor was not to be so put off. He answered, with his jewelled hand stretched out,

'My dear sir, I *know* that. But we *must* be, and we *shall* be, please Providence! I am new to this place. I practise because my heart is in my profession—for the pure love of science. Money—fees, as they call 'em—is no object to me.'

The other grinned and chuckled.

'I can believe that,' he said.

'You are a man of influence in the place. I hear them all talking and quoting Mr. Silas Toplady. Your name alone would be of inestimable service.'

'It would, would it? on my card, eh? Or possibly on a bill, eh?'

The Doctor was convulsed with laughter at this monetary joke.

'You are too much for me, sir,' he said. 'I come from town, where we are thought shrewd enough; but I find one man here who knows something more. No taking you in, Mr. Toplady—you see through a stone wall!'

This last compliment, judiciously and artfully put, has an effect upon the human heart which the most adroit would fail of. Tell a man that he is clever, learned, handsome even, and it will be considered a coarse bit of flattery; but let it be, as it were, extorted from us that 'he can see through a stone wall,' and a reluctant and even fatuous smile will steal across his face. At that moment the insinuating Doctor had made a conquest of the miser. Would he let him prescribe—try his skill on that troublesome cough? He owned it was from simply selfish grounds—a cure would be the making of him. When it was known and seen, he would be sent for far and near.

'Yes,' growled Mr. Toplady,

'and send me in a fine bill of fees.'

'Rather *you* will be entitled to charge *me* for all the fees that will flow in on me. 'Pon my word, yes; I'm serious.'

The result was very curious. The Doctor was, indeed, a sort of Don Giovanni among physicians; almost irresistible when he set himself to enslave a patient. A few nights after, the showy Doctor was sitting with his showy wife in their brilliant drawing-room.

'He bites, or rather has bitten,' said the Doctor. 'He is the only fish in this beggarly place—a poor hungry spot indeed.'

'And what will you do with your fish?'

'He shall come and live with us, so that I can carry out his cure better.'

'Come and live with us!—that dreadful creature! With our nice house and furniture!'

'*Our!*' repeated the husband, smiling; '*their*, you mean. It's not paid for by us. *He* shall pay for it. Yes, we must take him into the house—board and lodge him. He shall pay for all—the brougham, horses, your harp too—which these beggarly five-shilling fees never will.'

Within three weeks it actually came about; and the parish were electrified with the news that old Toplady had been taken into the insinuating physician's house, for the better superintendence of the cure. He had his little room—looking out on the garden—and his own hours. Strange to say, the stupid parish, instead of winking or smiling, rather admired the skill and adroitness of the physician, as though it were part of his medical knowledge. Old Toplady lent himself to the cure with a charming sort of moral helplessness; giving over his somewhat uninviting figure to be dealt with as the doctor

pleased. He affably agreed to use the razors left there for him, and to assume the suit of more modern clothes that had been ordered home for him. He also assumed an agreeable suit of manners, and transformed himself into the moneyed old gentleman of the arm-chair—with a sort of Lillivick deportment—hinting grandiosely at the future disposition of those magic 'stocks,' 'funded' property, &c., which he was known to possess. To Mrs. Redman alone was his presence a trial, and she frequently protested against her sufferings; but her husband exhorted her to patience.

'It is as certain as that the sun will rise,' he said. 'I have been over his chest again and again.' Here he spoke medically. 'The man can't last six months more. He's in a galloping consumption. I suppose the bit of lung left to him wouldn't cover—' and the Doctor looked about for some convenient standard—'half that envelope.'

'You said that four months ago,' she answered touchily.

'No, my dear; it was double that size then. All in good time. With the stethoscope for lead and line we can gauge every hill and hollow; and—all in good time. In my desk is a full disposition of his means; and with the exception of that thousand pounds to the Consumptive Hospital—'

'What absurdity!' she said; 'a pampered, overgrown place, a set of impostors!'

'Hang the Consumptive Hospital, my dear!' he said. 'But all in good time; I don't despair of upsetting them yet.'

The Doctor was a good medical man, and a good medical prophet as well. Long remembered in the parish was the momentous night when it went abroad that that old Toplady was at his last. It was almost at his last also, in a social way,

with the Doctor himself. Bills had been pressing for the unpaid—for furniture—not only bills, but demands couched in that brief and hostile tone of threat which is peculiar to the letter-writer whose request has been neglected or evaded. The truth was, the Doctor's descent on the place was by way of speculation or *coup-de-main*: he was to subdue the whole county by a week's battle; but he had failed. After the first shock, the older Doctor had made a rally. Things were looking ugly for the invading general; and it was curious that the Doctor's affairs and the health of his guest should have decayed *pari passu*, as it were, at precisely the same descending rate. So that actually both came to a crisis together; and when the unhappy miser was reduced to his last shred of lung, his attendant had received notice that a new legal drama would be enacted in his house, and that the playbill, as it were, was to be placed in the sheriff's hand next day.

Unhappy old Toplady, whose case, but for certain circumstances, might deserve pity, was at his last. The Doctor saw it was time. 'My dear friend, you must now make ready to—'

'I know—I know,' said the sick man.

'If you have any wish, anything to change or revoke, any more worthy object than that Consumptive Hospital, already lavishly endowed, and from which you have derived no advantage—a selfish community, notoriously so eager for your death—'

The other turned his face over, and in a husky voice, but still with the same curious expression—one of enjoyment almost—said,

'What would you like?—They sha'n't have it.'

'My dear sir,' said the Doctor, bringing over paper, pens, and ink,

all laid handy and convenient, 'a short codicil, which I shall draft—'

'Don't give yourself the trouble,' the other said still more hoarsely; he was going fast. 'It is yours, now—or—or—*any man's*.'

'Stupid!' muttered the Doctor. 'But the will, my dear friend; it is *in* the will, with the other property.'

'Yours also,' he said still more faintly, 'or—*any man's*.'

These strange words, thus repeated twice, disturbed the Doctor; for at first he had taken it something after the way a race is said to be '*any man's* race.'

This scene took place past midnight. After this he fell into a sort of doze, which lasted till daylight. The Doctor left him, and was much out of patience. About eight o'clock he went in again to the patient's room, who was now very near his end.

'You feel better, my dear friend,' said the hypocritical Doctor.

'O, of course,' said the other in a sort of wheeze.

At that moment some one brought in the morning letters—a whole sheaf of bills—bills which might have had their items written outside, so unmistakable was the blue paper, the formal round-hand and flourishes, and the seal.

He tossed them aside impatiently. Another sort of envelope had the word 'ATTORNEY' written on its outside as plain as paper and seal and handwriting could make it. This he would have tossed aside as impatiently, but that it was directed to 'SILAS TOPLADY, ESQ.' In 'GREAT HASTE—TO BE FORWARDED—MOST IMPORTANT!'

He read it, and gave a cry of joy and astonishment as he read, then rushed upstairs into the sick-man's room, flourishing it like a banner.

'Such news!' he cried; 'listen to this. This will bring you to life,

my dear friend;' and he read out the following:

'1 Taffy's Inn, High Holborn,
Dec. 31, 1868.

'SIR,—I beg to acquaint you that your name appears in the list of legatees in the will of the late Isaac White, of Lowtide-street, Riverside, West Strand, London; and that by the wording of the deceased's will all his property, amounting to 20,000*l.* 18*s.* 3*d.*, will be equally divided among those present, and among them only, at the residence of the late Mr. White above mentioned, on the 31st of January next, at the hour of 6 P.M. precisely. Begging you, therefore, to attend personally, and on no account to neglect this communication, I am, your obedient servant,

'SAMUEL BADGER.'

The other's eyes were turned to the letter with a strange eagerness. He could not follow the verbiage; but he had an instinct it was about money. He half raised himself.

'What is it?' he said hoarsely. 'Can't you be plain?'

'It is left to you, my dear friend, and O!—a sudden idea. His eyes wandered over to the pen and ink always ready in that room. 'O dearest friend, if you would but—now that the threshold of eternity is opening—'

But the change in the sick man was remarkable. He tossed about, clutched his hands wildly. 'To come *now*, to come *now*!' he gasped. 'What am I to do? It could ha' gone in an-nu-ity. Give it me; let me see it. I *shall* live to have my own money!'

'My dear friend, you shall, if we can help it; but in the mean time a short codicil; it is incumbent on you—a duty—'

'To die now that I have money!'

'Now that he has money!' said the Doctor uneasily; 'what can he mean?—But I implore you, my

dear friend, thus on the threshold of—'

There was a gurgle in the dying man's throat. He was trying to say something of 'an-an-ity.'

'Eternity, my dear friend?'

'*An-an-nuity!*'

He turned over, and died.

'Ruling passion strong in death,' thought the Doctor, looking at him pityingly. 'Annuity his eternity!'

But before noon he had found there was more sense than he dreamed of in that last word and dying speech. Ransacking the papers, he found that there was nothing left to them of the old miser but the mortal remains. His pecuniary substance had taken flight with his soul, and bore the fatal shape of an *annuity*.

But the new legacy—it was enough to turn him frantic. There was consternation in the house, agitated counsels, and secret packing. The game was up. The Doctor was preparing to 'cut,' and he made these preparations to a strange recitative of malediction on the dead miser upstairs. The worst was, he was expected to go through the formalities of poignant grief, and assume the bearing of a successful legatee. A handsome funeral was expected, but it was to be strictly private.

'I'd give him a pauper's funeral,' said the Doctor, as the undertaker left him, 'and rattle his bones well for him.' Then, as his eye fell on the lawyer's letter, he burst into a fury. 'To lose all this! Such a legacy! It would have paid all. One thing is a satisfaction: *he* won't beat the gathering of hungry relations; some one else wants *his* company. No, you old robber; you sha'n't make one of the legatees! Or, wait—'

He grew thoughtful—reflected a long time, and with a gleam of

savage humour in his eye went his way.

Mrs. Redman had the reputation of being a magnificent performer on the harp, though no one had ever heard any of her witching strains. Still the instrument stood there—a majestic gothic, unpaid-for, Erard—a sort of glorified abstraction of the idea *shoulder*: sometimes moodily wrapped in its leathern paletot, as if expecting a heavy shower; sometimes in *grande tenue*, blazing in gold and satin-wood, regarded with awe, but still untouched with a vestal reverence. Its wooden packing-case lay prone in the garden. The Doctor ordered coachman and footman to bring it up, saying the harp was 'a take-in—they have palmed-off one of their inferior things on us. It shall go back to them.' That night the case lay on the carpet in the drawing-room, quarters of unaccustomed luxury; while another sort of case, recently introduced, lay in an upper chamber. That night, too, Dr. Redman scarcely lay at all. The next morning Messrs. Chuckford's great wagon, and Messrs. Chuckford's men, came to take the case to the London and North-Western Railway; and the Messrs. Chuckford's men pronounced that 'it were the 'eaviest 'arp they'd ever hoisted on a wan.' A great card, nailed on it, was directed to Joseph Badger, Esq., Solicitor, with an inscription—'Not to be opened save in the presence of the assembled legatees.' This was duly read by Chuckford's men, but caused no more surprise than would an odd epitaph to a gravedigger. They had an equal experience with *their* packing-cases and their inscriptions.

At the gloomy lunch that day—for the next morning would be the day of the funeral, and of the arrival of sheriff's men, &c.—Dr. Redman, with a certain grim humour, said to his wife,

'I shall post this to-morrow, and it will reach on the morning the legatees assemble. The greedy souls will think there's more money to come to them. I would give fifty pounds—'

'A bill for fifty pounds, you mean,' his wife said scoffingly. 'Why, a better plan would have been to have gone and claimed the money: *you* have no scruples.'

Dr. Redman started up with a cry, 'O fool!' (this was addressed to himself,) 'I should have thought of that!'

'There are plenty of things that you should have thought of. Why, you were considered like him. It would pass without question. And we know he was your dear friend, and *would have left it you.*'

'Such an idea! Dolt—stupid donkey!' said the physician, still addressing himself; 'it's too late now; the thing has gone off.'

'Stop it, then.'

'It can't be. It's booked through, and will only be delivered to the consignee.'

'Well, you have a head!' she said contemptuously, though doubtful of the matter; 'and if you can't see a way to getting back your property—or my harp-case—you must be in a poor way!'

He hesitated.

'I declare I'll make the attempt,' he said; 'it's worth it.'

'But the funeral—the remains?' she said, with a motion of her head upstairs.

'Well,' he said, with a grin, 'I *do* go after the remains. Remains, indeed; I've no patience with him—carcass is the only fitting word.'

The next morning the miser was buried unostentatiously; though every one wondered at the absence of the chief mourner. He was set down as being arrogant, 'bloated' with his new riches, 'infernal ungrateful'; it was set down, besides, as being bad taste.

The harp-case had been consigned to a luggage-train, which had started at midnight on the mournful, skulking, undignified, slouching course—the tramp and vagrant of the line—odious, and a burden to all, unpleasant to station-masters, who, with contempt, good-nature, and pity mixed, seem to deal with it much as a fine lackey would with a mean friend who wanted to slip through the 'all without being seen by the master. 'Now, then, you; get along quick—there's a chance for you now, or you'll be caught.' On the back of such a wretched pariah—a burden to itself from its mere length—a crawling, jingling, rickety sort of centipede, sneaking up to a station, or cowering at some miserable siding until the express went by—was laid what was called the 'arpkess. The luggage-train—the 'arpkess, of course, included—was under the charge of three officers, Tom, Bob, and Jack: Tom the guard, Bob the driver, and Jack the stoker. During their progress, Tom the guard led a Trappist's life in his break-van, Bob and Jack being about a quarter of a mile away in front on the engine. The train a heavy one, and the 'arpkess was very large; so its end projected a good deal, and it was a very 'awk'erd' customer to load and put away. Indeed, Tom, Bob, and Jack had many colloquies over it, Tom being uneasy, as it seemed, to spoil the symmetry of his train.

'Ugh! I'm ashamed on it,' he said in disgust; 'it's getting more and more a highscore every moment—bulging here, bulge there.'

He grew so affected, that at the next convenient stoppage—they were skulking for their lives from an over-due express—an attempt was made to adjust the symmetry of this unlucky package; and then they found that the weight was so utterly abnormal they could not

stir it without a general disturbance. Tom the guard declared that 'many was the 'Rard 'arpkesses he had fixed, and you could lift 'em all like babbies.' However, the luggage had to halt here for two hours, owing to a block on the line, from about a half-dozen expresses, which were to dart about and cross each other like 'pinkeens' in a pool. At this crisis, Tom, Bob, and Jack—their train drawn close, and skulking under a hedge, as it were—saw a gentleman wrapped in a cloak come over to them from the refreshment-room, and accost them all three. Jack the stoker was busy wiping the many noses of his engine, which seemed each to have a heavy and oily cold.

'There's a mistake here,' said the gentleman; 'a case sent forward which ought not to go on—'

'Which?' says Tom the guard.

'Ah, there it is,' said the gentleman eagerly, touching the protuberance with his umbrella; 'that harp-case. It must—'

'Booked through,' said the guard, 'on the bill. Can't, without orders.'

'O, nonsense! it must, my man. You have no red-tape in you, I know.'

Tom the guard came up to him. 'But that's an 'arpkess, is it?' he said significantly. 'Sure? cock sure?'

The gentleman looked red. 'Of course it is; any fool could see that.'

'But *is it an 'arp* that's inside?'

The gentleman grew more red still, and turned away. He went to the station-master, who told him nothing could be done. The gentleman got in a passion. 'It's absurd,' he said, 'dragging my property away from me at this rate. Precious circumlocution manager you are.'

'I know my business and my

duty; and I tell you what, mister, I doubt if you have any business with the case at all. The trick's been tried on us before now.'

The gentleman turned away confused. Meantime the block continued; they could not get the line clear. The luggage train—'articulated'—bending and jointed like a spine, got out a little, but had come back, backing with precipitate haste, not a second too soon.

'They near had us that time,' said Tom, as the northern express tore by them. 'Back her a bit now into the shed; there ain't six inches to spare—it's *too* fine.'

She was backed into the shed; but the bulging harp-case struck a pillar,—'That stirred it,' as Jack said,—and made it symmetrical at last.

The three sat down together to wait better times; the engine's various noses being wiped with rags, and with unwearied good-temper on the stoker's part, who would have made an excellent child's nurse. Each lit his pipe; but as the match was being drawn across the case-end, Bob saw something glitter. 'Gold by the Flevens!' he cried.

They all jumped up; a splinter had been broken by the collision, and gold was certainly gleaming. What was it? Bob took his knife, and prized-off the splinter. He gave a cry. 'I knew it, boys; an 'arp never weighed that. *It's the platin's of a coffin!*' They all came and looked at it—looked at each other. Each was thinking of the man, and his eagerness.

'He's done it,' said Tom. 'It's it,' said Bob. 'There's a reward out,' said Jack. Each whistled; and Tom, whose rank gave him leadership, withdrew. He returned with the police. Those officers at once pronounced the case suspicious; drew out their dark-

lanterns, and after a prolonged examination, pronounced, as an original discovery of their own, 'Why, this is a coffin!'

Almost at the instant of this declaration, a man was seen coming up softly, wrapped in a cloak. The others drew the policemen back into the shadow.

'Look here now, my good fellows; you are men of sense, and I daresay men of the world also. Now I *want* that case, and must have it. We know, of course, it's against the rules—and all that; but *how* much, my men? We understand each other, eh?'

'But, I say,' said Jack cunningly and slowly, 'before we come to that, what sort o' thing might be inside now? You know it ain't an 'arp, nor a 'Rard one neither.'

The other hesitated—he could trust them. 'Well, it's not. It's a—a piece of marble—of sculpture, you know.'

'O, maybe a statther—a figure?'

'Precisely. So now, my men, name your terms.'

A bull's-eye was suddenly flashed upon him, and the policeman's hand was on his collar.

'It won't do,' said the latter. 'It's all up. Case strong against

you. Arrest you under suspicious circumstances.'

The man staggered back. It *was* suspicious. He was faltering out something, when they—all there—heard a strange and hurried tapping near them. They looked round. It was heard again. Their faces turned pale.

'Why,' one faltered, 'if it *ain't* in the coffin?'

On that signal they all fled with a cry, save Tom the guard, who returned, and who cried, 'Come back, there's a man in it! quick! Where's a hatchet?'

They paused. The police alone exhibited hesitation.

In a moment the 'arpkess was down, stove open, and a true coffin revealed. In another moment any promiscuous undertaker would have been scandalised at seeing a nice and costly bit of his workmanship hewn into splinters. Old Silas, in a third moment, was sitting up and staring at them!

Such is the wonderful force of the ruling passion, that he had strength to rally a little; and in his husky voice ordered himself to be carried to old White's house.

[What he found there will appear farther on.]



OF THE THIRD LADY'S SECOND HUSBAND WHO DID NOT COME AT ALL.



THE SECOND MISS MANTAWLEY.

MR. TODGER PHIPSON was a fair young man with very long legs. The legs seemed as if they had grown out of all proportion to his body, and were weak in consequence; they were too long for the size of his head, which was small, and would have looked smaller but for the abundance of his hair and whiskers. Altogether there was about Mr. Todger Phipson the air of a man who did not quite belong to himself; there was a want of fitness in him. He was not plain, and he dressed well, so that in re-

pose he was not much amiss; but when he walked, it was another matter. There was something then quite absurd in his very long shaky legs.

At twenty-five he fell in love; and as his mind resembled his legs in a peculiar want of decision, he could not decide which he preferred of the three Misses Mantawley. They were not a bit alike; but he thought them all charming.

Blanche, the eldest, was small and sparkling, with bright dark eyes and hair, a sort of face suggestive of Christmas and hollyberries, and all the glow and lustre of the joyful season. Next came Julia, tall and dashing, with a certain air of determination about her. She was the beauty of the family, and she knew it, and always dressed to show-off the proportions of her exquisite figure—a girl artists raved about, with an arm which might have served as a model for the Venus of Milo. The third Miss Mantawley was called Selina; Lina her sisters named her, and it certainly is a much prettier name. Lina did not set up for beauty: she had a little fair face, with fair hair in a sort of cloud about it, and large gray eyes, with long lashes that cast a shadow over the said eyes, and made you feel you must look close to decide what their real colour was. These gray eyes were all Lina had to boast of. She was freckled, she had bright scarlet lips; but her mouth was wide, and

she had a little impertinent turn-up nose. There was scarcely any likeness among these sisters except that they all had good complexions; and Blanche and Julia had hair of the same colour.

Mr. Todger Phipson had danced with all three, one after another, earlier in the year; then he had met them at a lawn party, and had fallen in love with all three.

'I don't know what to do. It's a confounded bore. Why need they all go out together? It leaves a fellow no chance of making up his mind. Julia's the handsomest, no doubt about it; but then if I take Julia, I shall be fancying Blanche is the most loving;' and he sat pulling out his long fair whiskers for full ten minutes. 'After all, I believe that little Lina is the most amusing; she's such a dear saucy little thing; and a wife ought to be able to amuse a fellow on a wet Sunday, and so on. Julia's handsome—a distinguished sort of girl altogether; but those are just the sort of women who turn into bores. They want so much dress and attention. Nothing easy-going about them. It's an awful bother.' Here Mr. Todger Phipson got up and began to pace his room with long shaky strides. 'Why on earth can't women settle these things? it's confoundedly hard a fellow should have to make up his own mind.'

It seemed to Mr. Todger Phipson that, on the whole, it would be advisable to choose that one of the Misses Mantawley who would be most likely to be attentive to him.

'I shall be very fond of her. Why, I'm fond of all three of 'em already; but my wife must be thoroughly attached to me. I shall expect her to settle everything. Of course'—here Mr. Todger Phipson went back to his easy-chair, having looked at himself in the glass over the fire-place—'one knows well

enough—in these days—one has only to choose—the girls are quite ready.'

Mr. Phipson had a good deal of 'haw-haw' in his way of speaking: it sounded as if he were always clearing the way for some extra valuable observations which never came.

The Misses Mantawley lived with their father in—in a very unfashionable place indeed, but they really lived there—Russell-square. I believe a good many girls with expectations live in Russell-square. The Mantawleys did not expect much from their father; but they had a rich cousin, Mr. Brown—cousins, as you know, are not much, they have such a way of changing their minds late in life, and taking to housekeepers and hospitals.

'I know what I'll do,' said Phipson, standing quite erect for once on his long shaky legs; 'I'll call; and whichever of the Mantawleys I find at home, I'll propose to—'

It is a far less nervous business to be in love with three women at once than only one. Mr. Todger Phipson managed to walk into the drawing-room at Russell-square with sufficient self-possession; but it was very disconcerting to find all three sisters there together, all looking charming, all glad to see him. He stayed some time, but they evidently did not suspect his intentions, or if they did they had no intention of furthering them—there was no chance of a *tête-à-tête*.

'It's an awful bother,' said Phipson to himself, as he reached his chambers, 'and I don't exactly see how one's to get out of it; perhaps they're always together. I suppose one couldn't speak to one before the other two, could one?' he stopped and pulled out his whiskers by way of counsel. 'Well, no, I fancy not; because if the first wasn't willing or anything of that

sort, the others might feel huffed not to have been asked first, and I really don't care which it is,' he said, with strong emphasis,—'I don't really, now.'

Mr. Todger Phipson went to bed; but he could not sleep, the Misses Mantawley were too disturbing; and strangely enough the one he had thought of least, that insignificant Lina, with the great shadowed eyes and the turn-up nose, was the most tormenting of the three.

'By Jove, I'll call again on Sunday, and I'll not leave the house till it's done.'

A decision with Mr. Phipson was so rare an occurrence, that its effect was overpowering; he fell asleep at once from pure exhaustion.

Sunday morning came. Mr. Phipson overslept himself, and spent the interval between his breakfast and his visit in making cigarettes with an ingenious little machine he had purchased in Oxford-street.

'Clever fellows, those Frenchmen,' said Phipson, as he made up his twelfth cigarette; 'so much mind in all they do; a most scientific little invention that.'

He took out a pair of new gloves, brushed his hat with extra care, and went in a hansom to Russell-square.

'Not in from church yet, sir,' the footman said. 'Will you come in and wait, sir? they won't be long.'

Mr. Phipson hesitated. This seemed a very decided step; but the footman held the door open in such a peremptory manner, that he went in.

The chairs and sofas in the drawing-room were to Mr. Phipson as uncomfortable as the wooden stools in the story of the Three Bears proved to the very inquisitive little boy who tried them. He went from one to another. His legs grew more and more wangly and limp, and his whiskers straightened as his chin drooped.

At last the door was thrown open, and in walked all the Misses Mantawley.

'Good gracious,' said Todger Phipson, 'I never can do it!'

'We are going out of town to-morrow,' said Blanche. 'I'm so glad you came to-day; we are going to Brighton with papa.'

Brighton! just the place where girls like the Mantawleys were sure to be seen and admired. If they only would have stayed on in London at this dull time of year, they would have been safe.

'And I should have had time to decide,' groaned Phipson. He was more puzzled than ever to-day. Blanche had something red in her bonnet, and with her veil drooping half over her eyes, she looked bewitching. Julia was handsomer than ever in her sealskin and velvet. Lina, perhaps, was a shade less attractive than usual. She looked so very cold. 'There's no help for it,' he thought. 'If I don't have one or the other, I shall go distracted.'

The door opened again.

'Captain Lucas and Mr. Broughton.'

In came two gentlemen, and the Misses Mantawley looked radiant.

Todger Phipson felt himself eclipsed. He pulled a letter out of his pocket, tore three slips of paper from the envelope, and twisted them up differently. He named the first Blanche, the second Julia, the third Lina, then dropped them into his hat. He looked round. All the three sisters were still devoted to Captain Lucas and Mr. Broughton, especially Selina and Julia. No one was looking at Todger Phipson. He shut his eyes and drew a lot; it was Julia.

'By Jove, and she's the only one who makes me nervous! Well, she's much the best-looking; and if one has to go about with one's wife at all, it's just as well to have

that sort of woman. But, good gracious! how's it to be done?'

It seemed as if fortune was going to help him. Lina asked Mr. Broughton to look at 'that love of a fern in the conservatory;' and Blanche looked at Julia.

'Have you shown Captain Lucas your new photograph?'

Julia looked haughty.

'No,' she said carelessly; 'I don't know where it is.'

Blanche rose, and went to the farther end of the long back drawing-room; the Captain followed her.

Todger Phipson found himself quite alone with Julia Mantawley.

She looked pale and pensive—he thought very handsome too.

'Miss Mantawley.' Julia looked up, and Todger Phipson was startled. She looked down again directly, and he went on—

'Dear Miss Mantawley, circumstances must excuse abruptness,—he had made this up, and got it by heart in the hansom—'but I can no longer live happy without you;' then he stopped gasping. 'Dear me,' he thought, 'how hot the room is! if one could only do it like *écarté*,—I propose—I accept—'

But Julia Mantawley said something else—

'You are very kind, Mr. Phipson; but I am not free now, I'm engaged to Captain Lucas;' and then she got up and walked into the other room.

'Thank heaven,' said Phipson, as he watched her stately steps; 'there's something too commanding about her. I believe if I could only make up my mind—I like Lina best.'

Obedience was Mr. Phipson's crowning virtue. If you had taken him to the top of the Monument, and asked him to decide whether it would be best to come down or remain where he was, he would possibly have stayed at the top;

but if you had told him that it was his destiny to go up and down the Monument twenty times in one day, he would not have shirked a single ascent. He was resolved now to let Fate decide for him. He had put the other two lots in his waistcoat-pocket; he drew one quietly out and looked at it—it was Lina.

'Bravo!' said Todger Phipson; and, as if by magic, Lina came into the front room.

The trio were still busy over their photographs. Lina had just said 'Good-bye' to Mr. Broughton in the conservatory: she looked agitated.

Todger Phipson felt more excited this time. He rose up, and met Lina before she had time to cross the room.

'Miss Mantawley, can I say a few words to you?' murmured Todger Phipson.

'O, yes, certainly.' Lina hardly knew what she said; she had just accepted Mr. Broughton, and she was in love with all the world at that moment.

'But will you say "yes"?' said Phipson tenderly. He felt much more nervous than he had felt with Julia; he really was in love with this dear little girl.

'Very likely;' and Lina looked up merrily into Todger Phipson's eyes—such a long way above her own.

She blushed at what she saw there, in a sweet confusion that made her distracting.

'O Mr. Phipson, I don't quite know.'

'Ah!' said Todger desperately, 'yes, I understand, you're like me—I never do quite know; but I know I love you, and I want you to say the same.'

Lina looked sweetly ingenuous—girls of her type have a way of doing it.

'O, dear Mr. Phipson, I'm so sorry—I never thought, you know,

of you in this way—and only now—only just now—I've engaged myself to Mr. Broughton; it can't be helped, can it?' and she looked into Phipson's eyes with sweet pleading helplessness.

'Can't it? dear me!' said poor Phipson, for once putting his shoulder faintly against the wheel of Fate; 'can't it, Lina?'

'No—no—no, too late now,' said the soft little creature; and then she sighed, and went off to join her sisters.

Todger Phipson feebly ground his teeth, and then a bright thought came to help him—his love had made him sentimental.

'It's like those what-d'ye-call-'ems in the *Merchant of Venice*, and the third choice there was the right one. I'm not sure, Blanche isn't prettier than Lina, and perhaps she'll care more for a fellow.'

He had grown callous by this time.

He waited and waited till Julia went with Captain Lucas to call on his sister, and then he walked up to Blanche and asked if he could speak to her alone.

He need not have asked this; for Lina had not come near him since his proposal, and Blanche had been talking to him as if to make amends for her neglect.

She blushed and smiled, and went on blushing and smiling till he had asked her to be his wife. Then she spoke of her papa, who, as Todger Phipson well knew, had been quietly out of his mind for years, and was not likely to interfere; and then she asked him to come downstairs to luncheon, and he went.

'It's done now,' said Phipson when he got home again; 'and I wish it wasn't. I think, if I could be quite sure, that I prefer Lina—'

Next day he travelled down to Brighton with the young ladies and their father.

They went to the Grand Hotel, and so did he. But when he had parted from the ladies, he walked down to the sea in a very perplexed state of mind.

Blanche Mantawley had asked him to help her choose a bonnet.

'If this sort of thing's to go on, you know,' said Todger Phipson, apostrophising the waves, 'why it'll use a fellow up in no time. Why, I never can decide on my own trousers. Why, one of the uses of a wife is to settle everything. Good heavens, she'll be asking me to choose her gowns next.'

Next day, as he was coming downstairs, he met Lina going up.

'Has Blanche told you?' she said.

'Told me what? Good gracious me,' he said to himself, 'she wants me to settle something else for her.'

'Well, it is a secret,' said Lina reflectively; 'but you are almost one of the family, so you must know, it's broken off between Julia and Captain Lucas.'

Todger Phipson whistled—he went on whistling till he reached the bottom of the stairs.

'She'll do much better for me than Blanche,' he said to himself. 'She's a sort of woman who'll be sure to choose her own bonnets.'

He went into the coffee-room, and wrote a note to Blanche. He said he felt sure he could not make her happy in the way she wished. It was better for them both to marry people of a decided way of thinking. 'Don't you think so?' he ended; 'I really wish you would say so, and settle it.'

Poor Blanche! she really cared about him; but she felt sure he preferred Julia, and she had always given way to Julia; so she accepted his rejection.

Todger Phipson wrote another note to Julia.

'If you'll accept me,' he said,

'you shall always settle everything your own way.'

This was just the point on which Julia and Captain Lucas had quarrelled. He had asked her to stay in London, and she had persisted in going to Brighton. She had always been considered before Blanche; so it did not occur to her to consult Blanche now.

Julia accepted Todger Phipson.

Before they left Brighton, Lina flirted so desperately with Michael Cassidy that Mr. Broughton would not stand it; they quarrelled, and their engagement came to an end.

When Todger Phipson learned this news, he walked up and down a lonely part of the beach, injuring his whiskers and cursing his fate.

'This all comes of deciding,' he said. 'I know now that Lina's the only one of the three I ever wanted; if I had just let things settle themselves, I might have had her.'

He tried to make up his mind to write to Julia, and get set free from his promise; but he could not decide on doing it. There was a decided tone and manner about the second Miss Mantawley which kept those who knew her in check. Besides, Todger Phipson had done more in the way of deciding during the last month than he had done all his life before; and in consequence his legs were more shaky than ever.

Todger Phipson had been educated for the bar, and had chambers in the Temple; but he had never found anything to do there except the manufacture of weak papers for magazines, and slashing notices on novels. When he went back to town, however, he found business awaiting him—business relating to property in the south of France which would involve much careful research into old family archives. If he went himself, he should get change of scene and save expense; it would take him

six months at least, and he would get well paid for his trouble.

He consulted Julia, and she decided that he had better go.

The place he went to was called Ville Franche—about as out-of-the-way and uncivilised a place as you could wish to see. The work among the old papers was interesting, or Todger Phipson must have been bored to death. The principal person in the place was a Marquis, the Marquis de la Roche—an old man with white hair, who wore patched trousers, and had a mud floor in his sitting-room. The room had been boarded once, but the old gentleman received such constant visits from his pigs and his poultry that the mud got the upper hand and hardened into a permanent carpet. The Marquis wore earrings; but he dispensed with pocket-handkerchiefs, and took snuff out of a gold snuff-box with a portrait of Louis Quinze on the top.

'Picturesque person, very,' said Todger Phipson one afternoon, when the old gentleman had pressed him affectionately to share his dinner; 'but if he's his own cook, and I strongly suspect he is, I'd rather be excused.'

It was a fine bright afternoon; and instead of going home to his dusty books, he strolled out of the town, sat down and sketched some laundresses with pretty caps and ugly faces toiling up from the river with their buckets of freshly-washed linen; then came a timber-cart drawn by oxen, gay with scarlet fringes and tinkling glittering bells, and Todger Phipson booked one of the oxen; and lastly came the postman with his greasy leather wallet and his long iron-shod staff.

'Here, you *garçon facteur*, *arrêtez*, stop, stand and deliver!'

The man grinned; he knew the English milord with the long shaky legs, and he pulled a letter out of

his wallet and gave it to Todger Phipson.

It was from Julia Mantawley.

'DEAR MR. PHIPSON,'—('I say,' said the lover, 'it used to be dearest Todger; what's been happening?' he felt a strange sensation of relief, and he thought directly of Lina's eyes looking through her straggling hair,)—'at the time of our engagement, you may perhaps remember that you asked me always to decide for you. I think you will say that I have always endeavoured to fulfil your wish, and therefore it seems to me well to decide now on ending our engagement. I am sure we are not suited; and, as you are doubtless aware, people who don't suit can never decide for one another; but I hope we may always be friends. I am, dear Mr. Phipson, yours with every good wish,

'JULIA MARIA MANTAWLEY.'

Todger Phipson threw up his hat in the air and caught it again.

'What a blessing it is, after all, to have to do with a woman who knows what's good for you!—of course, she sees I'm best suited to Lina. Let me see—a week more, or a fortnight, will settle these papers, and then I'll go back—or I'll write,' he hesitated a moment. 'No, I won't write; that's deciding, and I don't want to decide anything any more.'

On that day fortnight Todger Phipson found himself at Folkestone. The coffee-room was almost empty—it was still early July. He took up the *Times*. Usually he avoided the column of births, marriages, and deaths, but an unusually long advertisement caught his notice and he read it. First came the church and the names of the clergy, and then the marriage of Blanche Mantawley to Adolphus Broughton, of Julia to

Captain Lucas, and of Selina to Michael Cassidy.

The paper fell out of Todger Phipson's hands, and he fell back in his chair. Poor fellow! it was very hard; he really had cared about Lina; and to think that, if he had only stayed in England and broken off with Julia, he might now be the husband of her youngest sister, was more than he could bear.

It was, on the whole, fortunate that he was compelled to go back to London on account of this French business, or he might have been driven to do something desperate. As it was, he shut himself up in his chambers and worked doggedly.

One day in the Strand he met Mr. Mantawley.

'All well, I hope,' Todger Phipson spoke nervously; the old man had got mourning on.

'My daughters are all as well as can be expected, thank you. I've got the poor things in Russell-square again.'

Todger Phipson's heart had gone down into his boots, but it came up again now and stuck in his throat.

'I—I don't quite make out,' he stammered.

'Have you not heard? Bless me, how very extraordinary! why it happened three months back, just after the wedding, you know; dear me, how very extraordinary, very so indeed! why, I thought all London knew; bless my soul!'

Todger Phipson didn't bless Mr. Mantawley, he very nearly cursed him for not speaking out.

'I say, what's happened? can't you tell a fellow?'

He bent down over Mr. Mantawley, who was short, and he longed to shake him.

'They all went out in a boat, you know, all at once. I can't tell you what happened; no one can, you know, because they kept

it all to themselves. They all went out in one boat, all together, and they all came home separate; the boat washed ashore at one place, and all the three apart, one after another. It's very sad, isn't it? Julia bears up the best; but it's very trying, I can assure you, very. Come and see us, Mr. Phipson; we shall be pleased, I'm sure.'

'This is a very extraordinary world,' said Todger Phipson to himself. 'I'm sure, within the last nine months I've had ups and downs enough to last for nine years. I expect the world feels it's getting old, so events are crowding up; in fact, they know they have not got a chance of happening else. I expect it's steam; one gets used to moving about so fast that everything else has to move at the same rate. I wonder now how soon a widow thinks of a second husband? I'll be shot if I decide again; they must just settle for me; one of the others will tell me how soon I can speak to Lina.'

Mr. Mantawley went home, and told his daughters he had met Todger Phipson; and then he left the three ladies together in the drawing-room.

Blanche and Julia both wore caps—very becoming caps indeed—which contrasted admirably with their rich dark hair. Lina had not a cap. She was unhappy enough without it, she said; and besides, it spoiled her hair; and poor dear Michael had been so fond of her hair.

'I wish papa had not asked Todger Phipson to call,' said Julia; and she threw back her head haughtily.

'Well, I don't know. We see no one; and really it is very, very dull,' Blanche yawned wearily. She had not cared for her husband, and she had no memories to go back to. 'What do you think, Lina,' she said to Mrs. Cassidy, who sat

drearily in a corner of the room by herself.

Lina looked very white and wretched.

'Dull! O, I'd rather be dull, wouldn't you?' and then the poor little thing hid her great swimming eyes in her pocket-handkerchief.

Julia felt called on to expostulate.

'We ought not to consider our likes and dislikes,' she said with majestic wisdom. 'We have to consider our duties to life and to society. I'm not sure Blanche isn't right. I believe the admission of an old friend like Todger Phipson is a very judicious act; he used to be very fond of you, Lina.'

'Don't!' said poor Lina.

She got up and went away. She really had loved Michael Cassidy.

'Giving way is so weak,' said Julia: 'and really, so badly off as Lina is left, the sooner she thinks of marrying again the better.'

'I think so too,' said Blanche—she had been left with a comfortable income. 'But, Julia, I cannot see why Todger Phipson should be given to Lina.'

'My dear, he won't have you; he tried you once, and gave you up.'

Blanche held her tongue; she was quite snuffed out.

Todger Phipson called. He saw Mrs. Broughton and Mrs. Lucas. Mrs. Cassidy stayed upstairs during his visit.

'She was so devoted to poor Michael,' Blanche whispered to Phipson.

Julia overheard, and her eyebrows met in a heavy frown.

Todger Phipson called again; and this time Lina was in the drawing-room.

'By Jove,' said Phipson to himself, 'she's lost all her looks; there isn't the ghost of a laugh in her. I declare I like either of the others as well. Confound it all, what is

a fellow to do? Can't any one tell me which I like best?

He went home and thought it over; but it was getting too much for him. He grew pale and thin; he stayed away from Russell-square, trying to make up his mind. At last he got a note from Julia Lucas, asking him to dinner.

He found all three sisters together.

'Papa is dining with our cousin, Mr. Brown,' said Blanche. 'But, dear me, Mr. Phipson, I hope you are not ill; you look so thin.'

Todger Phipson gave her a haggard despairing glance; then he looked at Lina, and then at Julia. Something in her face drew him on to confidence.

'My dear friends,' he said, 'I'm very much worried. I'm not sure that I'm not being worried to death. The best way seems to ask you to help me out of my trouble, as you have all had a hand in causing it.'

Todger Phipson felt very faint as he said this; it seemed such a decided step; but as he remained sitting, no one saw his legs shake; in reality, they nearly shook themselves off.

'We shall only be too glad,' said Julia; and Blanche murmured, 'So glad,' and looked up softly into Todger Phipson's eyes.

'I—I love you all three,' gasped Phipson; 'and yet I can't, for the life of me, tell which I love best. What is a fellow to do?'

For the first time since her husband's death, Lina burst out laughing, but she put her handkerchief to her eyes to hide it; Blanche blushed; and Julia looked motherly and compassionate. She was the only one of the three who had grown matronly by marriage.

'You want us to decide,' she said. You see, she had the advantage of being used to Mr. Phipson.

'Exactly,' said Phipson; 'if you

only can do that, you'll earn my everlasting gratitude.'

Julia thought for a few moments.

'I think we can settle this best by ourselves,' she said. 'Suppose we go down to dinner, Mr. Phipson, and tell you our decision by and by.'

'Just as you please. I can't tell you how obliged I am;' and then he added timidly, 'wouldn't it save you trouble if you tossed up which it should be?'

They all laughed, the idea was so absurd; and yet when they came upstairs again Julia proposed to act upon it.

'No, indeed,' said Lina; 'you may leave me quite out of the matter. Todger Phipson is not a man I could think of for one moment; besides, the memory of my poor—dear—lost—Michael.'

She burst into tears, and moved to the end of the room.

'I say, Julia.' Blanche had been turning the matter over mentally. 'I think this chance-work is foolish. Lina, you see, won't have anything to do with it at all. You don't care about him; you know you don't, or you would not have thrown him over as you did; and I really think I could make him happy. I always liked him.'

Julia looked at her sister in open-eyed amazement.

'There is something wonderful in widowhood,' she said to herself; 'it teaches a woman to say what she means;' and for a moment she was tempted to give way to Blanche's wishes.

Only for a moment, and then she saw the folly of this plan. Todger had jilted Blanche, and therefore was not likely to be satisfied with such an arrangement; and besides, of all the three, Blanche had least need of a husband. She was well provided for. 'Lina or I,' thought Julia, and then she answered her sister.

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'My dear, I don't think this is a question of inclination at all, and therefore I shall not take any notice of what Lina said just now. Todger Phipson is not rich, but he has enough to live on, and therefore I propose we all toss up for him. Which is he to be, heads or tails?'

This question, and some others of equal importance, having been settled, Todger Phipson was tossed for, and—Julia won him.

Blanche looked flushed and vexed.

'Such waste!' she murmured. 'Why, she tried him once and gave him up.' And Julia too, now that he really belonged to her again, recalled Todger Phipson's vacillating ways and sighed. Lina was the only contented person.

'You'll manage him and make him happy, Julia,' she said. 'Blanche would worry him to death; and I should tease him out of his senses.'

She took upon herself the duty of telling the news to Mr. Phipson when he came upstairs.

'Why, I declare, you don't look happy,' she said.

'I can't look what I don't feel,' he said sulkily; 'but if *you* are satisfied, I suppose it's all right.'

His eyes told Lina his meaning, and she did not repeat this speech to Julia.

'I could not love him if I tried,' said Lina, 'and he'll soon get fond of Julia.'

They went to France for their marriage trip—to Paris first, and spent Christmas there.

'By Jove,' said Todger Phipson when they had been ten days in Paris, 'I'd no idea money could go so fast. Money's just one of the things I don't want help in spending. Things can't go on like this. I don't see how we can do with less; the only way is to get more. I'll speak to Julia.'

Julia said the way was easy.

'When we go back, you must try and get an appointment somewhere. There's our cousin Mr. Brown, he might get you something; or your relation Mr. White; I've been told he's as rich as possible. But, dear, do come out now. I want you to go to Wirth's with me.'

Todger Phipson groaned.

'You'll have to decide, you know, whether it's to be White or Brown.'

'What, my mantle! black, of course.'

Next morning, before he had decided whether he should write to Mr. White or Mr. Brown, came a letter from Mr. White's lawyer—an invitation to Mr. White's house at six o'clock on the day fixed.

Todger Phipson read the letter over twice, and then gave it up to his wife.

'It's been travelling about after us, you see,' he said; 'but still there's plenty of time. By Jove, it seems as if the old man had died on purpose! I say, suppose we go back at once, so as to be ready.'

'There is no occasion for that,' Julia spoke with decision. 'Why, we have nearly three weeks to spare. You'll be able to give me that bracelet now, dear.'

Phipson gave himself up, and went and paid for the bracelet; also he hired a charming little carriage for Julia, and was persuaded to go on to Pau.

The weather was lovely for the time of year. They met plenty of friends, and the time flew. A Russian countess and her brother were charmed with Julia.

At last Julia reminded her husband that he must start next day for London.

'All right,' he said. 'Just get the time-book, settle my route for me, and the train we are to start by, and we'll go.'

Julia had an appointment with the Russian countess, and she could not keep her waiting.

'Don't be such a baby,' she said. 'There's no route to settle. You must go direct to Paris by Bordeaux, of course. I don't think I'm going with you: you had better come back afterwards. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye! why, she's gone. She settled everything coming here, and we didn't come by Bordeaux at all. I can't go without Julia. Why, there may be something to decide when I get there. I shall wait till she comes back; she's only driving, I daresay.'

Todger Phipson went out, met a companion, and took a stroll in the forest.

When he came back, he found a note instead of his wife.

'The countess must be in Paris to-night; so I have gone with her. We shall go on to London, and I hope to meet you at Mr. White's at six o'clock on the 31st.'

'But which way am I to go?' Todger Phipson's legs trembled so that he sank on a sofa, while his

hands buried themselves in his beard. 'There's Calais, and there's Dieppe; and I can no more decide which way I'll go than I can overtake Julia. Why, it's worse than it was before. She's decided everything for more than two months, and I couldn't do it if I tried.'

He sat with the time-book before him; but it was no use. Then he thought he'd sleep on it.

'It may settle itself while I'm asleep.'

He overslept himself, and lost the early train; when he got to Paris he lost another while he was trying to decide between Dieppe and Calais; and finally reached Calais after the boat had started.

'Well, Julia'll be there,' he said; 'and Julia will do much better than I shall.'

And Mrs. Todger Phipson reached Mr. White's house in good time, and found—not Mr. Todger Phipson, but—what will be seen hereafter.



OF THE SECOND LADY'S FRENCH HUSBAND WHO CROSSED THE ALPS IN A STORM.



M. BERNHARD.

'*MON DIEU!* it is impossible, it is frightful, terrific! It will never abate, this terrible storm!'

The speaker, a slender, fair-haired, and sallow-complexioned Frenchman, was twisting his frame and his face into all manner of possible contortions at the window of a small hotel.

The hotel was the *Hôtel de la Poste*; and the place Airolo, a village on the Italian side of the great St. Gothard.

It wasn't a pleasant sight he was gazing at. Snow was pelting down in large flakes, beating against the casement, where the Frenchman

stood grinning savagely, and flattening his nose against the glass in a vain attempt to see even across the street. Occasionally a great cloud of snow, carried into the air like a whirlwind, completely darkened the atmosphere; while the wind howled loud and fearfully, shaking the little hostelry to its foundation.

'Ah, *sacré!* it is impossible,' he reiterated, after performing a sort of maniacal evolution round the room. 'Fate is against me. It is not for myself I care. I could do by myself—*moi*, but for my *pauvre* Thérèse. Let me see what she says again, *ma chère petite femme!*'

He pulled a black-edged letter out of his pocket and laid it before him, resting his elbows on the table and threading his fingers through his hair.

'*Mon cher ami,*' it commenced, 'you must return to England at once. My old uncle White has died quite suddenly, leaving a most extraordinary will. We shall be entitled to a large sum of money—ever so many thousands—provided we are present at his house on the 31st of January (he died on Christmas-day), but we sha'n't get a penny if we are not. Haste home, then, dearest. Great good fortune awaits us. You need never work again. Pray don't stop an instant after receiving this, as one day's delay would ruin all our hope. — Your faithful wife,

'THERESE BERNHARD.'

The letter was dated 1st January 1869; and this was the 25th, only six days before the promised distribution; and there he was, storm-bound and helpless, the frowning peaks of the St. Gothard between him and independence.

Emile Bernhard had been detained for more than a week at Milan on important business, but allowed himself sufficient time to reach England by the date in question. The weather was clear and fine; the road, though dangerous, not impassable; diligences were still running from Magadino to Airolo; but on his arrival in one the previous night he found, to his horror and dismay, a terrific fall of snow had completely blocked-up the pass. In vain he stormed, and danced, and raved. Mine host only pointed up to the great white mountains and down to the great white valley, and shrugged his shoulders with an air of hopeless commiseration. No horse could struggle up that icy steep, no guide risk his life on such a journey in such a night; so Emile was fain to tarry a night at the little Albergo, to find with the morrow's dawn the snow still falling steadily, pitilessly down.

It was still falling, Emile still prancing like a caged tiger up and down the room, when a man stole in silently and noiselessly, seating himself at one of the little breakfast-tables, on which were placed hot coffee and rolls. Emile stopped and glared at him; the stranger seemed at first to cower beneath his gaze and shrink farther back in the shadow of the room, then, with the politeness which is a foreigner's birthright, he raised his hat.

'*Bon jour, monsieur.*'

'*Bon jour sacré!* is this what you call *bon jour*? *Ciel*, it is the *diable*, it is monstrous.'

'You seem angry with the weather, *mon ami*,' remarked the stran-

ger, whose accent betrayed him to be Swiss. He was a marked contrast to Emile; his tall, thick-set, stalwart frame beside the lithe willowy form of the young Frenchman; his face almost preternaturally pale; his eyes large, dark, and deeply sunk; great masses of thick black hair hung over his pallid brow; and, despite the apparent coolness of his tones, the glances he cast upon his companion were restless and uneasy. Bernhard was too engrossed with the weather and his particular grievance to pay much heed to the stranger's appearance.

'I am angry,' he cried. 'I must be in England in four—five days; it is of the greatest consequence; it is life or death to me; and behold, I am detained by your villainous Alps! Was there ever such misfortune!'

Without replying, the Swiss rose up, and, going to the window, flung it open. He remained for a moment gazing at the sky, heedless of the wind and the snow; then closing it, came back to his seat, remarking quietly,

'It will be over directly.'

'And what then?' screamed the excited Frenchman. 'What if it is over directly? I cannot get across. Mine host won't let his mules go out; it is knee-deep in snow. It may be days before it thaws, and then I'm ruined, killed, undone.'

And he went dancing again round and round the room, wringing his white slender hands, clutching his fair light hair. A strange expression passed over the face of the Swiss.

'You are afraid,' he cried.

Bernhard faced him with a bound.

'Afraid! *Ma foi*, no; but I don't know the way. Your St. Gothard is a terrible mountain; he has crevasses, precipices. If it was *la belle France*!—but I don't know your Alps. I should be lost,

killed, and then what would become of my Thérèse ?

The Swiss gazed at him steadily.

'I'm not afraid, and I am going over to-day.'

'You ?'

'Yes, I ; why not ? If he cannot get horses, he can get guides. I almost know the track myself. The storm will be over soon. They never last very long at a time. See !' he continued, pointing to the window, through which there stole a faint gleam of pale watery sunshine, while the snowflakes had almost ceased, — 'see, it is as I say, the storm is at an end. Courage ! The pass is safe for men, if not for beasts. It takes a bigger mountain than St. Gothard to frighten me ; and we've several hours of daylight good, if you choose to come.'

The little Frenchman almost flung his arms around him.

'Ah, *mon ami* !' he cried, 'you have saved me. I will go with you gladly. *Ma pauvre* Thérèse, how delighted she will be !'

It was not difficult to find two guides, who, for a compensation never offered them before, agreed to see the two travellers across the pass as far as Andermatt, from which station they would easily obtain a conveyance to carry them the rest of their journey. The guides were stern hardy mountaineers. Every inch of the ground was familiar to them from childhood, and they were not likely to be afraid of a little snow.

As the Swiss predicted, the storm cleared up, and the sun, struggling out from behind the leaden clouds, gave a wondrous life and brilliancy to the scene so drear and desolate before. It imparted new strength and vigour to Emile Bernhard, as, alpenstock in hand, he toiled up after his companions ; and when, after an hour's stiff walking, the four men rested for awhile to gaze

at the prospect around them, a burst of awe-struck admiration issued from his lips.

On either side, as far as eye could reach, nothing but snow—white interminable snow.

Below them lay the beautiful valley of Canaria, its white fields glistening in the sunlight, the river, like a silver chain, gliding in and out between its banks ; the little hamlets, with their snow-clad cottage roofs, whence the blue smoke curled up through the calm pure air ; the deep forests of pine and fir, stretching far up the mountain sides. And above and all around them the mighty peaks of the Oberland Alps rested against the sky. Crag upon crag, mountain upon mountain, glacier upon glacier, flashing in the sunshine with a splendour that was awful in its grand sublimity ; a glory that was almost celestial in its wondrous purity and light. Chain after chain, ridge after ridge, the Alps, like giant warriors crowned with wreaths of pearly clouds and diadems of snow, with breastplates of polished steel and robes of deepest azure, fringed with forest-trees, seemed to be guarding the very portal of heaven. And as the rays fell softly on the slopes, tinging the edges with crimson and pink and gold, it seemed as if an angel's hand had but to part the fleecy clouds, that hung like a veil between earth and sky, to reveal in all its glorious and eternal beauty the wonderful City of God.

A Catholic, and intensely devotional, the whole soul of Emile Bernhard was stirred within him. He raised his hat in silent reverence to Him who 'dwelleth in light inaccessible,' and a fervent prayer of praise and adoration rose from his throbbing heart.

Through the trembling valley, the Trümmelthal, onward they sped, their feet now crushing, now

sinking in, now slipping over the snow. As the hours went on, the face of Nature changed. Dark shadows crept where all had been so bright before; dull leaden clouds hovered round the mountains; impenetrable mists veiled the valley from their view; the pine-trees waved their feathery arms like shrouded spectres barring their approach; the noise of falling avalanches echoed through the distant hills; the sullen roar of the mountain torrent as it came tumbling from its cradle on the summit, carrying stones and trees and blocks of ice in its descent, fell on their hearts with a terrible chill. At intervals crosses of wood, placed there by the piety of man, bade them remember that mournful journey up Calvary's Mount. The scene was gloomy enough now; but Bernhard, light of heart and light of foot, went bounding on, every now and then bursting into a snatch of song—a sweet French *chanson* learned in early youth. The guides caught the infection;

‘Auf die Alpen, auf die schönen Alpen,’

burst from their lips. Only the Swiss, Walter Gaspard, travelled on in moody silence; his tall gaunt figure gliding ghostlike over the snow; his white scared face and dark unearthly eyes turned every now and then upon his companion.

Suddenly he stopped, and uttered a scream. Bernhard sprang to his side and seized his arm, fearing he was about to fall; but the Swiss, his whole frame trembling with some fearful emotion, was pointing down to the ground.

‘Look!’ he hissed; ‘it is blood, blood! it has crept as far as this! Will nothing stamp it out?’

And he crushed his feet violently on the snow, which to Bernhard's

astonishment was of a bright-crimson hue.

It lay in broad red patches over the path, deepening in hue as the Swiss trampled it down. Emile gazed first at him, and then at the crimson ground, with undisguised astonishment, till the guide ran up and explained that the *dicernea nivalis*, or red snow, was not at all uncommon on the higher Alps.

‘What a fool I am!’ exclaimed the Swiss; ‘I thought it was blood. How could blood come here?’ and he laughed a strange wild laugh that caused Emile to shudder, he knew not why.

They passed the rock that marked the spot where Suwarrow lay down to die; and, faint and exhausted, they claimed for a little while the shelter of the good monks at the Hospice, who were only too glad to relieve them with food and wine.

In vain the fathers begged of them to stay the night up there; in vain warned them that every mountain sign betokened a coming storm; warned them of the risk to their own lives and those of the guides. But they were determined: it wanted two good hours to sunset yet; the descent was comparatively easy. Bidding their entertainers a kind good-bye, and preceded by their guides, the travellers commenced the descent; hope firing their courage, and giving renewed animation to their jaded spirits.

The sunlight had all departed as they entered the defile after leaving the Hospice, and a wet dreary mizzle blew coldly into their faces and nearly blinded them. The wind, which had previously abated, howled ominously round the beetling crags. A sound like muttered thunder echoed amongst the hills. They could see nothing before them but black

precipitous rocks, solemn snow-fields, gloomy ravines, and impenetrable depths.

Riven mountains stood out in gaunt relief, hideous precipices yawned over fearful abysses which the mist but partially concealed from view. The wind swept in sudden gusts, causing the snow to rise like dust, the firs to rock and roar, while the torrent rushed down the black defile like the thunder of artillery. The men, aided by their alpenstocks, moved cautiously on, keeping as close as they could to the rugged, almost perpendicular wall, to whose sides they clung to preserve themselves from slipping. Suddenly Gaspard flung himself on his companion.

'Lie down, quick!' he cried. 'See where it comes!'

Bernhard gazed to where he pointed; at the top of one of the highest mountains arose a cloud of something that looked like smoke. An instant, and an awful mass of white leaped into the air and fell with a terrific crash but a few yards from where they lay.

'It is the *staub-lawinen*,' cried the Swiss in a voice of anguish, when they had recovered from their fright. 'The storm is upon us; we are lost!'

Emile looked round, the guides were nowhere to be seen; whether they had fallen over the abyss, or been crushed beneath the snow, he never knew. The fir and pine trees lay stripped of their bark and twisted like reeds in the path; a hollow ominous moaning went reverberating down the gorge. The truth burst upon him—they were alone on that terrible mountain, exposed to all the horrors of an alpine storm. To retrace their steps was impossible, to go on seemed equally so. One false move would hurl them to destruction, and to stay where they were was almost certain death. The wind howled

round them with terrible rage; the shadows deepened; the mountains seemed to grow nearer and nearer, revealing frightful crevasses in their rugged sides. A howling as of ten thousand demons met their ears, while the shrieks of lost souls seemed to mingle with the blast.

Emile staggered along, groping his way by the side of the rugged rock, every gust of wind threatening to blow him over the precipice. A sickening horror fell upon his heart; he dropped on his knees and buried his face in his hands, uttering an agonised prayer for mercy; he felt his last hour had come. Never more would he see home, Thérèse, his own dear land of France. Never more would he hear the voices of his children calling to him in the twilight; never hear the patter of their baby-feet; never feel their dewy kisses on his lips.

A cold perspiration broke out from every pore in his body, when his attention was attracted to the strange behaviour of the Swiss, who, standing with uncovered head, his dark hair streaming wildly in the wind, was shouting and gesticulating with all his might.

'Ha, ha!' he cried; 'so you're coming for me, are you? I thought that I should escape; but you are stronger now than I. Come on, friend or devil, whatever you may be; I'm ready for you now.'

Bernhard grasped him by the arm.

'*Mon Dieu!*' he cried, 'what would you do? Are you mad, man, that you rave like this?'

Gaspard clutched his hand, his eyes flashing, his form dilated.

'Hark! did you hear that scream? that is how *he* yelled. I can hear his voice above the roaring of the avalanche; he has come for me. Let me go.'

But Emile's arms were round



him; lithe and supple as a cat, he held his companion back, till the man quivered like a reed in his embrace.

'You think I'm mad,' he screamed hoarsely; 'but it's all true that I say. I've seen his face in my dreams night after night. I saw him as we came up the mount, peering behind the crags. You didn't see him; but I did. He went before us all the way. And I knew I should meet him here—here where I killed him.'

A terrible suspicion crossed Bernhard's mind: was he indeed the companion of a murderer?

'Of whom do you speak?' he gasped, when horror permitted him utterance.

'Of him—my master, whom I murdered here. Listen,' he cried, retreating back into a niche formed in the rock; 'listen; I will tell you all. I flung him over yonder chasm. I had no mercy on him. I laughed as I heard his shriek for mercy, as I heard the crash, crash! thud, thud! of his body on the jagged rock. Didn't you see his blood upon the snow? the Reuss won't wash it out. Hark, there's his voice again!'

'Why did you kill him?'

'Why?' laughed the man; 'for money—for the beautiful red shining gold. I've got it all here; I've carried it ever since. He is coming for it; but he sha'n't have it. If I go down, it shall go down too. See!' he cried, tearing open his vest, and disclosing two leathern bags, 'it's all here—gold, notes, and all. *You* don't want it?' he continued, suddenly peering into Emile's face; '*you* wouldn't try to get it from me, would you?'

'God forbid!' cried the Frenchman passionately; 'I wouldn't touch your cursed gold to save my life. Kneel down and pray for pardon, wretched man; don't die with this dreadful sin upon your soul.'

'Pray? I pray?' laughed the Swiss; 'what's the good of praying? Can it save us now?'

Even as he spoke the wind came sweeping round the frail shelter where they stood, flinging him upon his back at some distance from Emile, and driving the latter, bruised and bleeding, against the rock.

The Frenchman clasped his hands. Spent and fatigued, he felt as though all hope was over; that in another moment the whirlwind would carry him over the abyss, as he saw it carry the trees and stones.

The Reuss, how it clattered down the steep ravine! how the wind shrieked and moaned and roared! the shrill cry of the l  mmergeier sounding above all the storm.

The cruel cold pierced him through, the misty drizzle had soaked him to the skin. A strange drowsiness was creeping over his senses. He felt as though he must lie down on the snow, and pass from sleep into eternity. Yes; he would struggle no longer.

One fervent prayer to Heaven for pardon, one sigh for poor Th  r  se, and then his eyes fell on the prostrate form of the Swiss, who lay, half-stunned, almost at the edge of the cliff.

How terrible was the fate of that miserable man—dying such a death unrepentant and unforgiven, with the awful proofs of his guilt hugged to his murderous breast! What if his imagination did not deceive him—if the lost soul of the murdered man really pursued his assassin—if the gold so fearfully obtained were really to prove his ruin? He had read of such things before. All the tales he had ever heard flitted before his brain, and a wild hope gleamed for a moment as he recollected cases in which the giving-up of ill-gotten goods had appeased the fury of the evil spirits. He remembered the tale of the prophet Jonah, how the wa-

ters were stilled when he was flung overboard. Quick as thought he precipitated himself upon the Swiss, planting his knee firmly on his chest. Powerful as Gaspard was, the superior training of the Frenchman gave him a double advantage. The man cowered and shrank under his nervous clutch—under the grasp of that small white hand.

Emile cried, 'Gaspard, I won't harm you—I swear I won't—if you'll do as you are bid; but if you don't, then, by Heaven, you'll go over yonder rock!'

The Swiss gazed up at him with white ghastly face, his dark restless eyes gleaming with fear and dread.

Emile went on:

'It is that damned gold that is causing our delay. A curse must follow it wherever you go. Give it up—fling it over the chasm, where you flung its owner; it will appease his spirit, and we shall be saved.'

The Swiss trembled violently; he rose to his knee, Bernhard still clutching him with a grasp of iron.

'Are you sure?' he whispered—'are you sure it's the gold he wants, not me? I'd throw it over, if I thought—'

'*Ma foi*, do you hesitate?' exclaimed Emile passionately. 'Consider but a second, and then you go yourself! Get up, man,' he continued, as the Swiss nervously clutched his legs. 'Murderer though you be, I want not your blood upon my hands.'

Staggering like a man in a dream, Gaspard rose to his feet, while the wind and the sleet impeded his movements, and drove him against the stupendous wall. Then he unbound the bags from his neck, and flung them over the abyss.

They heard them go bounding down the gorge—the ringing, clanging of the gold, as the bags split

open in the descent, clearly distinguished above the storm.

The wind shrieked and screamed louder and louder; the torrent roared; a burst of unearthly laughter seemed to shake the hills. The Swiss knelt down amid the snow, trembling and cowed; his face bowed on his hands, through which the hot tears trickled, while Emile stood by his side, his eyes raised to heaven.

The great God of nature, who holds the seas and the winds in the hollow of his hand, did He not see their peril, and would He not help them now? Was it reality, or only a dream? In the black canopy overhead there was a little rift of blue; and in the blue there trembled a tiny star. The wind yet swept with unceasing force, but the mist had disappeared, and the mighty Alps were visible now, resting their giant peaks against the sky—snow-crest after snow-crest, summit after summit—sublime as eternity, and as awfully grand.

Another ten minutes of agonised suspense; the clouds rolled away from the valley below; and there beneath their feet, its lights gleaming in the darkness like so many beacons of hope, lay the village of Hospenthal.

The rift of blue above grew wider every moment; thousands of stars peeped out where only one had been before. The snow cast back their living radiance as from a polished sea of glass; the waters multiplied them in a thousand lovely forms.

And now the broad white path was clearly defined, bordered on one side by the beetling crags, on the other by unfathomable gulfs. The wind went sobbing, sobbing amongst the rugged mountains; the fir-trees waved their solemn branches in farewell. Almost as swiftly as it came the storm had passed away. Night lay in all

its splendid beauty on the lofty hills.

One fervent prayer of thanksgiving for his deliverance, and Emile Bernhard turned to his companion; but the Swiss made no reply to his remarks; sullen and moody, yet with humbled brow, he motioned to Emile to lead the way, following him at a little distance, as a dog would follow his master after having been chastised.

Emile was not afraid of him now, he seemed passive and tractable enough; but the brave little Frenchman shrank from all contact with the murderer, trampling over the pure white snow with the red sin of Cain upon his brow.

And now the outskirts of the village are reached, and a welcome cheer replies to his shouts. A party of peasants had come out to meet the travellers, lantern in hand, and conduct them to the hotel. Some police, attracted by the scene, were among the group; and before Walter Gaspard was aware Emile laid his hand on the collar of his coat.

'I give this man in charge,' he cried, 'on his own confession of having murdered his master higher up the pass.'

There was a murmur and shout; two men instantly seized the Swiss; but, to Emile's astonishment, he made no resistance, and suffered himself to be led quietly away; the rest followed the Frenchman to the hotel, surrounding him, asking a thousand questions as to the particulars of his story.

Bernhard was glad to escape from their friendly hands into those of the landlord of the Meyerhof, who, conducting him to an apartment, supplied him with a change of dry clothes, to replace his saturated garments.

A warm fire and a hot tumbler of cognac, soon restored the exhausted spirits of the Frenchman; and

when he entered the *salle-à-manger*, prepared to do full justice to the good dinner ready for him, he found the room already occupied by the principal men and officials of the place, who were anxious to receive his deposition.

Emile again recounted his story with all its attendant horrors, and at the end was vociferously congratulated on his marvellous escape, while bitter imprecations were launched on the murderous Swiss, and deep regret expressed for the unfortunate guides.

A benevolent-looking old gentleman, who had hitherto kept silence, yet appeared to listen with great interest to his story, now asked him if he was sure he and his companions were the only travellers on the mountain.

'*Ma foi*, yes!' exclaimed Bernhard. 'None would be so mad as to risk their lives, except in such a case as mine.'

'Were there any travellers at the hospice?'

'No; the father said no one had been for more than a week.'

The old gentleman looked deeply anxious.

'You will excuse me,' he said to Bernhard with a courteous bow, 'troubling you so much after your great fatigue; but I am very anxious, as I expected to meet a person here to-night who has not come. I am M. Bötzingen, of the firm of Bötzingen and Co., merchants of Geneva; and the person I expected to meet was our most trustworthy and confidential clerk. Poor fellow, he has been ill for some time at Bellinzona; but he gave his word he would be here without fail to-night.'

'I saw no such person,' cried Emile. 'I only wish I had met with such a man.'

'It is very strange,' murmured M. Bötzingen; 'I trust he has met with no mishap—he was to

bring me a large sum in notes and gold.'

A horrible suspicion flashed over Emile's brain. What if the Swiss was the murderer of the merchant's clerk—if the gold he had was the money of that unfortunate man?

'What—what was his name?' he stammered out.

'Walter Gaspard, native of Lucerne.'

Emile sprang from his seat, almost into the air.

'Why, that's him—that's the murderer's name!'

'He a murderer!' exclaimed M. Bötzingen. 'You must be mistaken, sir; he wouldn't hurt a fly; he's the most innocent fellow in the world—the only support of his widowed mother and sisters. It's for her sake I've come so far to meet him. Good God! the fever must have shaken his brain. Pray fetch him in, friends; don't keep him in custody.'

It didn't take long for them to reach the little police-station, where the Swiss was confined, and bring him back, manacled and bound, to the inn.

It was all true. Walter Gaspard was no murderer at all—only a poor innocent bagsman, whose mind had been affected by his recent illness, the storm and the danger completing the mischief.

It was M. Bötzingen's money

he had flung down the abyss; and the story he told was a pure fabrication—the result of a diseased imagination.

As he stood there now, his hands bound—his eyes, from which the light of reason had for ever fled, resting lovingly and piteously on his master—tears dimmed the sight of many a hardy mountaineer, while M. Bötzingen was visibly affected.

'It's not for the loss of the gold I care,' he cried, flinging himself into a chair and clasping his hands, 'but for this poor lad, and his widowed mother. God have pity on her!'

Three days later, Emile Bernhard was clasped to the heart of his dear Thérèse, whose tears flowed fast as he recounted the story of his peril on the mountain, while her faithful heart beat with rapture at his return. But not all the joy of seeing her and his children, not all the prospect of certain wealth, could obliterate from his mind the horrors of that fearful night, nor hide from his view that white scared face, and dark, wild, restless eyes, that he left behind on the Oberland Alps, whose memory would haunt him to his dying day.

[As to the certain wealth, however, something very remarkable has yet to be related.]

OF AN OLD GENTLEMAN WHO CAME ALL THE WAY FROM BERMONDSEY.



MR. WADDILOVE.

DOWN in one of the many narrow Bermondsey streets leading riverwards, where lofty warehouses rear themselves into the smoky air, there was a great block of buildings, a story taller than any others thereabouts, and, if possible, a shade dirtier, on the door-posts of which were inscribed the names of Davis, Chadbright, Shuttleworth, Goodchap, & Co.; and, judging from appearances,—a thing we are proverbially told never to do, and which, in consequence, we always are doing,—a capital business Messrs. Davis, Chadbright, Shuttle-

worth, Goodchap, & Co. did. All the elements of wealth were to be found in that narrow Bermondsey street. There was the dust, the dirt, and the griminess; there was the bustle, the hurry, and the scampering; there were the big carts blocking up the thoroughfare, and a perfect army of shouting and perspiring porters and warehousemen, who were for ever letting something down from the top story to the street, or pulling something up from the street to the top story.

They were in the fancy-goods line were these gentlemen, whose names were to be seen so frequently recurring about the premises; for Messrs. Davis, Chadbright, Shuttleworth, Goodchap, & Co. displayed their lengthy patronymics on most of their available property. On their door-posts, as aforesaid, in white letters on a black ground; over their offices, neatly engraved on brass-plates; on the top of their warehouse in black letters four feet high, in order that those who ran might read; and on all their carts, packing-cases, boxes, crates, and hampers; so that it was no easy matter for a stranger to walk through Bermondsey at any time of the day without becoming conscious of the existence of the firm of Messrs. Davis, Chadbright, Shuttleworth, Goodchap, & Co.

The career of the firm, from the day (many years back) when the warehouse was of small dimensions

and the clerical staff consisted of a man and a boy, up to the time when it rose to its marvellous prosperity, had been full of strange vicissitudes.

Mr. Alexander Davis, whose name stood first on the lengthy list, though at the head, was by no means the founder of the firm; indeed, when, as plain Sandy Davis, he started from the miserable cottage in the north—which it was a mockery to call house—to walk up to London, after the proverbial fashion, with the proverbial fourpence-halfpenny in his pocket, nobody ever expected him to be the founder of anything at all; indeed, if the truth be told, there were not wanting kind friends who prophesied Newgate, and ultimately the gallows, for the young ne'er-do-weel, who in his native town had, at the early age of thirteen, made for himself a reputation for sharpness which many financiers and assurance-office directors might have envied.

Sandy Davis, at the outset, bid fair to realise his friends' predictions. Ill-luck dogged him steadily in his start in life. Out of his slender capital the halfpenny proved to be bad, and led him into some difficulties with a small shopkeeper. He sprained his ankle, he caught the fever, and, about half way to the south, he got a week in prison as a vagrant; but Sandy was a lad of indomitable perseverance, and never lost the great object he had in view, viz. London and a fortune—for by country lads with the exact sum of fourpence-halfpenny the two always go together—and he walked, and rode (if he got the chance, which was but seldom), and, in the end, he one fine afternoon trudged into London, very tired and foot-sore, very hungry and dirty, very ragged and disreputable.

Guided by instinct, he wandered

into the City, and the sight of the wealth and prosperity around him acted as a reviver to his drooping spirits and weary limbs; and he cried, as all such youths have cried from Dick Whittington downwards, 'I too will be one of these merchant-princes.'

Having made this resolve, he did not at the moment see what further steps could be taken towards amassing a colossal fortune, so he seated himself on a stone step and wished for a penn'orth of bread.

In those days Sandy Davis was not above begging—indeed, in after life, he rarely lost anything for want of asking—and, as he rested on the step, he kept a sharp lookout for any benevolent old gentleman who might be touched by his tale of distress. But benevolent old gentlemen were scarce that day; moreover, everybody appeared to be in such a hurry and bustle, that Sandy doubted whether he could get any one to listen to his woes, told in broad Scotch.

As time went on, however, the pangs of hunger increased; and the lad, having marked down a middle-aged man, a trifle more benevolent-looking than the others, and in a trifle less hurry, he darted after him.

The old gentleman was in the act of drawing out his handkerchief as Sandy came up behind him, in doing which he jerked out a pocket-book of plethoric appearance, which Sandy immediately seized.

The thoughts of man are secrets, and we will give the lad the benefit of the doubt, by supposing he would instantly have returned it to the owner had he had the chance; but the gentleman upon whose benevolence he had been counting, happening to turn just at that moment, saw his pocket-book in Sandy's hands, and instantly collared him,

shouting 'Police!' Nobody paid any heed to the boy's remonstrances and excited statements; so Sandy was marched off to the station-house, and the next day got six months' imprisonment for picking pockets.

It so happened that a gentleman driving by to London Bridge, on his way to the Continent, had seen the whole transaction; and it further happened that, luckily for Sandy, he chanced some months later to be glancing over an old file of English newspapers in an hotel in Naples, and that his eyes lighted on a short report of a trial in which a certain Mr. Waddilove, a merchant of Bermondsey, prosecuted a lad named Alexander Davis for stealing, or attempting to steal, a valuable pocket-book. The travelling gentleman wrote off at once to Bermondsey, and gave his account of what he had witnessed, which entirely corroborated Sandy's story. The letter arrived in England only a week or two before the expiration of the term of imprisonment; but Mr. Waddilove, who, after all, *was* a benevolent man, went off at once, and, by dint of perseverance, procured the lad's release; and then, as the best atonement he could make, offered him the post of errand-boy in his counting-house at a salary of seven shillings a week, and with the right of sleeping under the counter; and from that time Sandy trudged steadily along the road to fortune.

Davis had not failed to profit by certain lessons he had learnt while in gaol. Never endowed with what people are pleased to term high moral principles, his compulsory residence amongst rogues and vagabonds had thoroughly imbued him with the notion that the only thing in the world to be dreaded was being found out; moreover, being a sharp lad, he arrived at the further conclusion, that the crime of speculation

was, as a rule, so clumsily managed that discovery was inevitable; but that, for a sharp lad who had his wits about him, there was a wonderful career open in the form of systematic embezzlement—not theft mind, Davis had not the courage for that; he dared not run the risk; but for what certain folks nowadays call sharp financing—in short, he made up his mind never to neglect an opportunity of turning the penny without troubling himself as to whether it was a particularly honest one or not. Davis saved money, and as he saved he invested, and a very fine thing he made of it; he was a very good servant to Waddilove, and, next to his own interests, looked after his master's; so that from errand-boy he became junior clerk; then he was promoted to a post of trust in the warehouse; and finally, when his employer was getting old, he found himself occupying the seat of honour in the counting-house as managing-clerk.

Shortly after this Waddilove most obligingly departed this life, leaving a widow to carry on the business; and Davis, being a man of business, with a purse in place of a heart, looked upon the widow Waddilove as a lucrative investment in the matrimonial line. After a decent time he proposed, and was accepted; the name of Waddilove was painted out, and the name of Davis painted in; and so the foundation of the great firm of Davis, Chadbright, Shuttleworth, Goodchap, & Co. was laid.

Davis was left a widower in the course of a couple of years, and being now a rich man, he felt he could afford to cultivate the affections, so looked about for a second wife.

He had not much difficulty in finding a pretty empty-headed girl, with a taste for dress and show and fashion, who was will-

ing to become Mrs. D. in consideration of luxuries which she could not hope otherwise to enjoy. She married him, and bitterly he repented of his bargain. His second wife was the moral attached to his story, showing that, though sharp practice and peculations may prosper for a while, they are sure to bring, in the long-run, a terrible retribution. She took him away from Bermondsey, and located him in a fashionable quarter of the town, where he had an hour's omnibus-drive daily to his place of business, for though she made him keep a carriage, she rarely suffered him to ride in it; and what with balls, parties, and operas, she led him such a life of it, that over and over again he regretted having devoted his attention to the tender passion.

He could not stand his new life—it tired him out; and one morning they found him lying dead in his bed. So for the second time the great Bermondsey business was in the hands of a widow.

Now Davis's foreman had been a certain Mr. Chadbright. Rumour said that Mrs. D. had been engaged to him in her early affectionate youth, but had thrown him over for the wealthier man. Be that as it may, Mr. Chadbright followed exactly in his late employer's footsteps, by taking charge of the business on his decease and then marrying his widow; the name of Davis was not painted out, but the words 'and Chadbright' were added; and so the second step was taken towards the construction of the great firm.

With marrying the widow, Chadbright's likeness to Davis ceased. He neglected the business quite as much as his predecessor had attended to it. He encouraged his wife in all her extravagances, and strove to excel as a man of fashion, and succeeded in imitating all the

expensive vices of his superiors, while he failed completely in attaining to any of their virtues. He went upon the turf, and lost heavily; he neglected his wife; and he made his way to the dogs at a remarkably rapid pace, with the result that at the end of three years he found himself in a most unpleasant predicament as regarded ready-money.

But Chadbright proved himself equal to the emergency. He advertised for a partner; and as the prestige which had attached itself to the house under Davis's management had not yet had time to fade, he had little difficulty in meeting with a gentleman, whose money exceeded his brains in quantity, who was willing to put a considerable sum into the business, and have his name painted upon the doorposts in conjunction with those of Davis and Chadbright.

Shuttleworth was the capitalist's name. He had many accomplishments. He could play nicely on the flute, he was rather good at pen-and-ink sketches, and he could drink brandy-and-water almost as fast as anybody could pour it out for him; but he had money, there was no doubt about that; so Chadbright put up with the flute, and the sketches, and the brandy-and-water, and took him into partnership—in fact, intrusted him in a great measure with the management of the business. Indeed Chadbright did not much care who managed it as long as he did not, so he went down to his country seat and enjoyed himself; and if anybody asked him anything about Bermondsey, he pretended he had never heard of such a place.

Prompted by his wife, Chadbright tried to get into Parliament. He opposed a real live lord at the general election, unsuccessfully. This freak cost some money, you may be sure, and before very long he found himself almost as badly

off as he was before he took Shuttleworth into partnership; for Shuttleworth's flute-playing brought no trade to Bermondsey, and a caricature of his on the back of an invoice lost the firm one of its best customers.

'What we want is new blood,' said Chadbright.

'Let's have new blood by all means,' answered Shuttleworth.

They got the new blood in the shape of Mr. Goodchap, but they did not get much money; for although the new partner promised well, he performed badly. He was willing enough to put what money he possessed into the business, he said; but as he didn't possess anything worth mentioning, it did not matter very much what he said on the matter. However, he managed to conciliate them by negotiating loans, so his name was added to the long list already painted on the doorposts; and the firm became Davis, Chadbright, Shuttleworth, & Goodchap. It only wanted the Co. to complete it, and the Co. came in the shape of a very strange and unexpected person, and in an equally strange and unexpected manner.

The Co. was no less a person than Mr. Waddilove, a grandson of the original founder of the business. He made his appearance at Bermondsey one morning when, by some strange chance, all the partners happened to be assembled there together, and introduced himself.

'My grandfather,' he said, 'was offended with my father on account of his marriage. He disinherited him, and never mentioned his name afterwards.'

'Like grandfathers do in plays,' observed Mr. Shuttleworth, making a rapid sketch on blotting-paper of a grandfather disinheriting his son.

'I have lived all my life abroad,' continued Mr. Waddilove, without

noticing the interruption, 'in great poverty, but—'

'We've nothing for you—nothing,' interposed Mr. Chadbright.

'Will you have the kindness to hear me out? I was about to observe, in the last few years I have made a considerable sum of money.'

The partners became suddenly interested, and Mr. Goodchap took a bill-stamp from his pocket and regarded first it and then Mr. Waddilove with much complacency.

'I know the state of your firm; it can't last long in its present condition. I have come to offer you assistance.'

'Three months, at the usual rate?' said Mr. Goodchap, seizing a pen.

'No. I know the business well, and I know what can be made of it. If you like to take me in as junior partner, and give me a voice in the management, I will put in a fair amount of capital.'

'What will you take to drink?' asked Mr. Chadbright. 'Let's have a bottle of champagne.'

The partners took little pains to conceal the pleasure they felt at the prospect of fresh capital being introduced into their tottering business; and as for a voice in the management, anybody who fancied it was welcome to manage the business; for, to tell the truth, it had in the course of the last six or seven years got rather unmanageable, and the greatest scope for the display of talent lay in the ability with which pressing creditors could be put off.

With one consent Messrs. Davis, Chadbright, Shuttleworth, & Goodchap proceeded to make out to their Co. that the firm had never been in a more flourishing condition; but young Waddilove pooh-poohed them. He knew very nearly as much of the state of the concern as they did, and was not to be taken in.

In a short time Waddilove was

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installed as junior partner, but his name was not painted on the doorposts. He came in as the Co., and he remained the Co. when all his partners had quitted the concern; and, as the Co., he represented not only himself, but Davis, Chadbright, Shuttleworth, & Goodchap.

These worthies found that in the old man's grandson they had a straightforward business-like young fellow to deal with, who put money into the business, and—what was more to the purpose—would not suffer it to be drawn out by his partners in order that they might indulge their extravagant pleasures at his expense.

The liabilities of the firm were enormous, and it took many years to pay them off; but by dint of hard work and close application he had managed, by the time he was a middle-aged man, to bring back the business to something like its original standing.

Then a bit of luck happened to him. Shuttleworth, who had given up flute-playing and caricature-drawing in order that he might devote the whole of his time to brandy-and-water-drinking, died of his fifth attack of *delirium tremens*, and the firm had one partner less to support. But Chadbright still lived, and drew three-fourths of the profits yearly; till one summer's day, seized with a business fit, he took it into his head to go over to Holland to see about a consignment of fancy goods. The steamboat, in returning, ran ashore on a sandbank. Luckily the fancy goods were saved; Chadbright was not. Next year Waddilove bought Goodchap out of the business; and so it came about that the Co. was the only real representative of the firm of Davis, Chadbright, Shuttleworth, Goodchap, & Company.

And a very fine thing the Co. made of it, now that he was un-

fettered, and could have matters exactly as he pleased. He was a clever man,—a man who devoted all his energies, all his talents, and all his time to business. Moreover he had marvellous luck; all his speculations succeeded; everything he touched turned to gold; and when he was an elderly man, bald and bent, he had amassed a fortune which he had neither the health nor the spirit to enjoy, and which he had not a notion how to dispose of after his death; for not a relative had he in the whole world save old White, who was older and richer than himself.

Waddilove had run too long in one groove to be able to get out of it. Though he was as wealthy as many who live in castles and mansions, he still resided in two dingy rooms in the warehouse over the office, surrounded by his fancy goods; and a miserable wretched life he had of it.

As a young man he had had but one desire in life, and that was to restore his grandfather's business, and reign supreme at the head of it. His desire was fulfilled; but instead of being a happy contented man, he was a morose gloomy cynic, disgusted with life and the world and everything in it. He had passed all his youth with no thoughts beyond his ledgers; and when at last he had leisure to mix with the world, he found it strange to him; so after one or two attempts he retired to his warehouse in disgust.

For eighteen months he had not been a quarter of a mile away from his place of business; and folks said he was going mad, and believed it too, until they tried to get the better of him in a bargain, when they found him very sane indeed; so instead of calling him mad, they called him 'peculiar,' and very peculiar he was.

'He never as much as passed

none of 'em the time o' day,' as his foreman said.

He rarely spoke; but when his voice was heard, it was usually in tones of reproof; for his eyes were as sharp as ever, and he looked after the pence just as carefully as he looked after the pounds.

And when young Waddilove became old Waddilove, this is what he was. He had made a fortune, and wasted a life.

One day, towards the close of the year, when great arithmetical feats were being accomplished with the books of Messrs. Davis, Chadbright, Shuttleworth, Goodchap, & Co., and wonders in the way of stock-taking were being enacted in the warehouses, Mr. Waddilove received the letter from old White's lawyer, announcing that gentleman's decease, and acquainting him that, as a relative of the late Mr. White, he would be entitled to a share of the money which the deceased gentleman had generously left behind him for division.

'Bother!' said Mr. Waddilove, when he had mastered the contents of the epistle.

He had known old White by name only, never having visited him; and as for the money, he did not want that, for he reckoned that at least forty relations would be present, and therefore that the share of each would be but little. He really thought he would not go—in fact, he made up his mind he would not; but somehow or other he could not drive the matter from his mind. Old White and his money haunted him; and when the day named in the lawyer's letter for his attendance arrived, Waddilove astonished everybody in his warehouse by appearing in a new coat, declaring he was going out for the day. The counting-house was aghast; but Waddilove never troubled himself about what his clerks thought or said, and went

off for a stroll from Bermondsey to the Strand, starting early in the morning, in order that he might make certain inquiries before keeping his appointment; for he had no notion, he said, of going to a dead man's house to be made a fool of.

When he reached the City, he was tired; for walking was an unusual exercise to him, and he looked about for a place to rest his weary limbs. Chance guided him to a mouldy old church, standing in a still out-of-the-way yard, leading from a quiet, deserted-looking lane, where the blindless windows of empty houses glared at each other like sightless eyes across the narrow street.

Truth to tell, Waddilove knew very little about churches, and had not been inside one for years; but as well as his recollection served him, there was nothing to pay for admission; so, the door standing open, he entered the vault-like church, in which a 'dim religious light' was obtained by the simple process of never cleaning the windows. He seated himself in the most comfortable pew he could find, and remained there unmolested for some five or ten minutes, when a jaunty little man with a smirk and a pair of spectacles tripped over the stones of the aisle, and approaching him, whispered in his ear, 'We're a-waiting for you, sir.'

'It's very good of you,' said Waddilove.

'The lady's in the vestry, sir.'

'Bless my heart,' said Waddilove, 'you don't say so! What lady?'

'Ain't you the bridegroom?' inquired the jaunty little man, his face lengthening till it hid his neck.

'Bridegroom!' exclaimed Waddilove wrathfully; 'do I look like a bridegroom?'

Truth to tell he did not, in spite of his new coat. And the little

man retired abashed, in much haste apparently, dreading violence; while the Bermondsey merchant sat, meditative, in the pew.

He was not a bridegroom, nor did he look like one; but that was no reason why he shouldn't be one some day. He had never before given the subject a moment's thought. He had hitherto looked upon marriage as a disease peculiar to young men; but for himself he had never had time to consider the advantages of female society; still as he sat there resting in the pew, he came to the conclusion that he was old enough and rich enough to take to himself a wife. Why should he not marry? At all events the matter was worth further thought and some inquiry, and who better could furnish him with anticipatory matrimonial information than the expectant lady in the vestry? Coming out from the pew, he walked straight to the vestry-door; knocked, was told to come in, went in, and found himself in the presence of somebody's bride-elect, who, in orange-flowers and a flutter, sat waiting the arrival of a tardy bridegroom.

She was about forty years of age, fairly well-looking, buxom, and with merry sparkling black eyes that turned inquisitively upon Waddilove as he entered.

'She'd do as well as anybody else,' thought Waddilove. 'I wonder, supposing the other fellow didn't turn up, if she'd have me?'

Just then the clock struck twelve.

'I'm very sorry, miss,' said the jaunty little man, who proved to be the clerk; 'but you can't get married to-day nohow.'

'Can it be done by proxy?' asked Waddilove, thinking it would be good practice to be married for somebody else, and so gather experience while he shirked responsibility.

'I wouldn't have him now if he came,' said the bride-elect, comforting a lady-friend, who was shedding bitter tears after the manner of lady-friends on the slightest provocation.

'I admire your spirit, ma'am,' said Waddilove. 'May I speak a few words to you?'

The ladies tittered.

'I'm a bachelor, ma'am, but I have notions of matrimony. Before embarking in a speculation I like to collect statistics, put facts down on the Dr. and Cr. side in a mental ledger, strike a balance, and decide on the course I mean to pursue.'

'How business-like!' chirruped the two ladies.

'I'm a-going to lock up,' interposed the clerk.

'Don't,' said Waddilove; 'but run out and bring back a couple of dozen oysters and a bottle of ginger-wine into the vestry.'

The clerk demurred. He had a notion that turning a vestry into an oyster-room was only one degree removed from sacrilege; but the happy thought occurring to him that he lived within a stone's-throw, and that he had a parlour quite at the service of the ladies and the gentleman, got him well out of the difficulty; and the trio adjourned to a little room with a lively prospect over the churchyard, and discussed matrimony and oysters.

'I think, ma'am,' said Waddilove, 'the balance is in favour of marriage.'

'And have you a lady in your eye?' asked the disappointed bride, sipping her ginger-wine.

'I have two,' answered Waddilove meaningly.

'But you haven't proposed yet?'

'No; but if it is not taking too great a liberty—'

Here Waddilove paused. He was on the point of proposing then and there, when he remembered that he

had heard or read that people were in the habit of going down upon their knees when they made a formal offer. He hesitated; he was doubtful about being able to get down, and he was still more doubtful as to getting up again unassisted, so he had recourse to subterfuge, and put the matter in a round-about way.

'My dear ma'am,' said he, 'suppose—mind I only say *suppose*—you and I wanted to be married, could it be done at once—say this afternoon?'

'No, but it could early to-morrow morning,' replied the bride with much alacrity.

'It would be very good fun, wouldn't it?' said Waddilove.

'Capital,' answered the lady.

'And it would serve the other fellow right—I mean the fellow who didn't come this morning—wouldn't it?'

'It just would,' said the lady.

'I've a great mind to try,' said Waddilove.

'I would, if I were you,' advised the lady.

'Well, then, ma'am, suppose we do get married to-morrow morning?'

'It is so sudden,' said the lady bashfully; 'but as I've got my trousseau all ready, it does seem a pity to waste it; and as for the other fellow, I could never bear to speak to him again. No, never, never, never!'

'Then,' said Waddilove, with a sigh, 'may I hope?'

'You'll have to get a special license and a ring,' said the friend, tittering.

'So I shall,' answered Waddilove; and just at that moment the clock struck five.

Up to this time he had forgotten all about old White and his share of the legacy; but the chiming of the church-bells reminded him that he had but an

hour to get to the appointed place of meeting.

'Business before pleasure, ladies,' he cried, jumping up and putting his hat on, and making for the door. 'I really must leave you.'

'But, sir—*dear* sir—I want to—'

'Can't wait a moment, ma'am; but I'll write by to-night's post, and will come and see you first thing in the morning.'

'But, my dear sir, I don't even know your—'

'I can't wait, ma'am, not a second, or I shall perhaps lose several thousand pounds;' and the next minute he was gone.

As Waddilove walked along the crowded streets he felt well pleased with what he had done. He thought his success with these ladies showed a wonderful power of captivation, and being an old man, with no experience of Cupid's camp, he felt flattered. Yet still as he walked on and thought further how he was saddling himself with an encumbrance for life, he was inclined to doubt the wisdom of the step he had taken.

'It's like buying a cargo of goods without seeing the invoice or the bill of lading,' thought Waddilove. 'What security have I that she will be according to sample? I wonder if I'm an old fool, after all?'

He walked on, and actually began to regret what he had done.

'What do I know about her?' he soliloquised. 'Nothing—absolutely nothing, beyond that she is Miss—or stay, didn't she say she was a widow?—beyond that she is Mrs.—Mrs.?—Hang me if I can remember her name!—Stay a moment, though, did I ever hear it? No. Why, I don't even know her name—and I'm quite sure she doesn't know mine—and I haven't a notion where she lives; the clerk doesn't know either, because I asked him.'

Mr. Waddilove became more and more meditative as he drew near the end of his walk.

'I can advertise, of course,' said he, 'though it's expensive. "The lady who lunched with a gentleman on oysters and ginger-wine is earnestly entreated to send her address without delay," &c. &c.—I wonder if it will be worth while?—yes, I certainly will advertise—though, I don't know—on second

thoughts, perhaps not.—No, I really don't think I will.'

And when Mr. Waddilove knocked at the door of the house of the deceased White at exactly five minutes to six, he had definitely made up his mind to take no further steps in the matter, but to spend the remainder of his existence in single blessedness. And—

[But more of this anon.]



*OF A RESPECTABLE COUPLE WHO
MET WITH AN ACCIDENT ON
THE UNDERGROUND RAILWAY.*



MRS. GANDY.

MOST persons who have the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Gandy — when accompanied by Mrs. Gandy — must somehow find a suggestion of John Gilpin stealing over their minds. Not that there is any particular personal identity with, or even likeness to, any portraiture of the 'citizen of credit and renown' who had an involuntary ride to Ware; for Mr. Gandy, so far as bulk and bodily proportions go, would by no means fill Gilpin's riding-boots; but the notion arises from association with Mrs. Gandy, who inevitably brings into one's mind

the very ideal of Mrs. Gilpin. It is impossible not to feel sure, as you look at Mrs. Gandy, that she is a 'careful soul;' that she has 'a frugal mind' even when 'on pleasure bent;' and what is absolutely certain to arise, when she and Mr. Gandy form a tableau, is a conviction that, like her prototype, she is master of every household situation, even if she did not say so; and frequently it would be perceived that she is a long-headed woman, of an imperious temper, and an adept in the science of hen-pecking. A portly person, which overshadows and eclipses Gandy's wizened form, is, on state occasions, intensified by dresses of heavy materials and pronounced colours; it is just doubtful whether, even when crinoline was worn, Mrs. Gandy needed that aid to the balloonism of her costume; and altogether, when she was in that condition of dress which, if one was speaking of an Indian, one could call her 'war-paint,' she was about as formidable a female to encounter in a crowd where she had to dispute her right of precedence as any meek man would wish to avoid. Now though Mrs. Gandy was, in her own esteem, long-headed, she was by no means exactly clear-headed in particular circumstances. That organ, which phrenologists say indicates an aptitude for, so to speak, mentally mapping-out localities, and remembering their features and peculia-

rities after once seeing them, and which is to be taken as a specialty of all great military commanders, was singularly deficient in Mrs. Gandy. She was in a remarkable degree one of those remarkable ladies, whose name is legion, who are the amusement or the annoyance, as the case may be, of omnibus-conductors, inasmuch as they invariably desire to be taken to Hampstead in a vehicle that all eyes but their own can see is bound for Chelsea. But as her tendency to locomotion was small, her inconveniences in this regard were in proportion; while in the matter of railway-travelling, her indisposition to trust herself to steam motive-power amounted to horror. Tunnels were things of fear; the screeching of steam-whistles was shocking to her tympanum as well as to her nerves; the obtaining of a ticket was a feat to which she had to 'bend up' all her faculties, mental and corporal, and in nine cases out of ten it was a wrong one; while its preservation to the end of her journey was a matter which to say was problematical, would be to indulge in very inadequate phraseology. Now it happened that these pains and penalties, whenever she had to undergo them, might have been spared to Mrs. Gandy, if she would only have followed the course of polite society, and let her male attendant, who was her husband, do all this kind of thing. For Gandy, though a quiet man, and subject to an enforced silence at all times in the presence of his wife, was shrewd and collected in his ways, and methodical in his habits; so much so, that, despite the contempt in which his spouse held his intellectual and business qualities, he had managed to accumulate a snug little fortune in a trade which need not be specified, since he had, at the time when he becomes an ob-

ject of interest here, long retired from it. His means, however, were not so very great as to render him indifferent to any addition; and you may rest assured he rejoiced exceedingly when one day a letter came from one Badger, Mr. Gandy's dead cousin's solicitor, to say that on a certain day at 6 P.M. precisely, at the deceased's house in Lowtide-street, Strand, a large sum of money which the old gentleman had left behind was to be shared amongst his relatives there assembled.

It may easily be conceived of the relative characters of this middle-aged couple (for it should be said that they were both past forty, and yet not fifty, which is the nearest approximation to a revelation of their actual years which need be made), that of all perils by rail which they could possibly have to encounter, those which might be met in the Underground Railway would be the most terrible. That line, as many a head-aching Londoner knows to his cost, is nearly one tunnel in all the length of the main line and its extensions. Half-a-dozen other lines debouch in its principal stations. Ticket-offices are multiplied infinitely. Trains come in every two minutes, every one apparently independent of its predecessor, and going to a different destination. With that curious facility for vocal mystification which seems to be part of the idiosyncrasy of the railway porter specially developed, no human ear can ever distinguish the names of the places to which the trains are going, as they are yelled shortly, or muttered out gruffly, by those whose business it is to guide the errant wayfarer to the carriage which should bear him to his destination. The first descent from the outer world into the abyss in which the line is constructed brings on so decided a change of thought and

feeling and idea—there is so great a contrast to the light, and what may be called the smooth viability of the streets—that bewilderment is inevitable, and it is wonderful that entrance into the wrong train is the exception and not the rule.

The distraction which is the normal condition of passengers at every station culminates at that of Farringdon-street. At most of the others there is diversity of train and divergence of route ; but there the whole ‘correspondence’ comes to one head. There is the point of departure for every destination in the whole known world. You may start for Baker-street, or the Hudson’s Bay Territory ; and it may happen, that when you think that you have actually set out for Hudson’s Bay, you find that you are compelled, by a misadventure of tickets and ticket-places, to get out at Baker-street. Even in such a place—so wild, so confusing, so, in many respects, defectively arranged—were to be found, on that eventful day when White’s legatees were to comply with the condition of his will, Mr. and Mrs. Gandy. How it came about that Mr. and Mrs. Gandy had determined to travel by the Metropolitan Railway from Farringdon-street, near to which station they resided, is very easy of explanation. It was so seldom they went out together, that, having to make a journey on the day of the distribution of old White’s money, they determined, before going to the Strand, to call on a friend who lived near to the Edgware-road Station. It was the wish of Mr. Gandy to go by the Underground Railway, no matter for what reasons ; and accordingly, when the mode of transit came, as of course it would, under discussion, his cue was to object as strongly as he could to any notion of going by the Metropolitan ; and he dropped hints of darkness, me-

phitic atmosphere, and the absolute necessity of rapidity of movement in getting out of the carriages—a suggestion which was likely to fall with a certain point on Mrs. Gandy’s ear. He proposed a hansom cab ; a fly, which should also be a handsome one, though in a different meaning and orthography ; an omnibus ; and in his eagerness he was almost blurting out something about a bath-chair drawn by a donkey. The astute Gandy gained his end. From the moment he would have none of the Metropolitan Railway, Mrs. Gandy would have none other conveyance ; and hence they were in due time at the Farringdon Station.

Mr. Gandy had expressed an opinion that the proper hour to start was three o’clock ; consequently he found himself under the stern guardianship of Mrs. Gandy at the station at one. It happened on this occasion that there was an unusual crowd, and the divaricatory purposes of would-be passengers enormous. This time Mr. Gandy did not put himself forward ; he was anxious to get the tickets himself, and so he carefully did not offer to do so. For once his artfulness failed him. The taking of the tickets was a matter of business, and as to trusting Gandy with that, it was out of the question. Their destination was the Edgware-road. Presently Mrs. Gandy found herself projected towards a ticket-office, nearly the centre of a hustling throng, whose movements were calculated to test to the utmost the elasticity of Mrs. Gandy’s joints. Flushed, flustered, indignant, she was thrust against the pigeon-hole ; and she asked for tickets without any distinct specification of the place which they were to indicate, and received such as a peculiarly nonchalant clerk—and that is saying a great deal—thought she required. It was not his fault

that they were the right ones; but, in fact, they were. When, however, any one has obtained the proper license to travel—which is not always a certainty—the difficulties of the Metropolitan traveller are still before him, and in force, as they were in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Gandy. He has to get on to the proper platform, into the right carriage, and by a fulfilment of the doctrine of chances that happens, he has to nerve himself up to a preternatural watchfulness in order to ascertain when he is at the station where he ought to get out; and there are besides other *désagréments* which tend to perplex and often to irritate the *voyageur* on this line. On this occasion Mr. Gandy had his wits about him, and by a skilful device he satisfied himself that his wife had really obtained the right tickets; and then—on the wrong platform—he calmly awaited the arrival of the train. He was in no hurry; but Mrs. Gandy was as ever impetuous, and as soon as a train glided up to the platform on which they were standing, she darted forward—if she could be said to dart—and made for the first carriage, the door of which was open, nor ‘cast one longing look’ at Gandy, who was, as she presumed, too well taught the habit of trotting behind her to need any looking after. But Gandy did not follow at once, and rapidly. For a moment he was looking at—it must out—a very pretty girl who was amongst the bystanders waiting for trains; and so he did not miss Mrs. Gandy; and he thought the less about her, because he believed that their hour and their train had not come. Presently, as his eye sought Mrs. Gandy, he beheld the train sliding away, and the head and umbrella (a corpulent one) of Mrs. Gandy protruding from a carriage-window; while a shrill cry, in which his name was distin-

guishable, and which for its sound might have been either a lamentation or an imprecation, floated through thick sulphurous circumambient air. Most probably what Mrs. Gandy said was an anathema rather than an expression of tender regret, judging from the equanimity with which she composed herself in her seat, her demeanour indicating no tender solicitude as to the fate, in a railway sense, of Gandy. On flew the train; and anon Mrs. Gandy began to observe that the tunnel was not so bad after all. It was by no means perpetual. A stoppage took place in a few minutes, and immediately afterwards it was observable that the train was passing through a pleasant suburb, the houses being all of a villa-like character; then through grassy fields and trim hedgerows, and what would have been leafy trees in the pleasant summer-time. It had just begun to occur to Mrs. Gandy that all this was not very suggestive of the Edgware-road, as that region is comprehended in the course of the Metropolitan Railway, when the train again stopped, and she was a witness to a phenomenon; for a railway porter actually called out *distinctly*, ‘Hendon.’ Mrs. Gandy had entered a Midland Railway train.

The situation was, in a domestic sense, and having reference to Mr. Gandy, appalling. The railway had put asunder those whom matrimony had joined together; and there pressed on Mrs. Gandy’s mind an idea, which was common with her, of Gandy’s utter helplessness and childish inaptitude for taking care of himself when absent from her side, which, like most mistaken beliefs, was one of the strongest in her mind. In the very torrent and whirlwind of her rage and apprehension, Mrs. Gandy had just common sense left to see that

her first act must be to leave the train ; and having, as she found, an hour to wait, she ensconced herself in a corner of the waiting-room, in an attitude and with an air which did *not* suggest a recollection of patience on a monument. At that hour of the day there were few passengers to or from Hendon ; so that Mrs. Gandy was able to watch the movements of a man who had sole possession of the platform, up and down which he paced with an irregular step and a certain irritability of gesture. His appearance was strange in the extreme : tall, thin even to emaciation, haggard in feature, with a complexion which might be called pale-muddy ; long, grizzled, unkempt hair hanging down to his shoulders and mixing with a beard and whiskers of preposterous proportions ; so that all his capillary developments combined to make up one hideous and eccentric *chevelure* ; his eyes rolling wildly, while a perpetual half-smile was flickering on his lips, so that some straggling teeth were just visible through an aperture in his beard made by the slight opening of his mouth ; his clothes hung loosely on his form, and had a peculiar appearance, as if he had fallen into a river with them on him, had been dragged out by means of one of those terrible hooks which the Humane Society keeps for fishing people out of the water, and had dried his garments without taking them off by the simple process of walking several miles in the sun. In short, if ever there was such a thing as an English fakir, even in such an aspect would he most probably have appeared.

Presently his eye fell on Mrs. Gandy as she 'by the fire sat disconsolate,' and as the Fakir, however cold and withered his appearance, was of a specially sociable disposition, as evidenced by an

irrepressible desire to talk to every one whom he came near, he at once made up to the lonely female, and inquired the cause of her palpable dejection. He spoke with so much volubility, and with so strange an accent (after-inquiries enabled Mrs. Gandy to ascertain that he was a Northern Irishman and had been a Quaker), that he was scarcely intelligible ; but enough was understood by Mrs. Gandy to enable her to state her sorrow and ask advice. The very practical suggestion, that she should return to the station where she had left her husband, was at once made by the Fakir ; but the lady was racked with doubts as to whether he was there. She had no confidence that Gandy would not make an effort to get to the Edgware-road Station by himself, and, of course, be lost in some way or the other, baby as he was. Then she was tortured by an idea that he would, by an unwonted flash of inspiration, discover the train that she had gone by, would enter the next, that went, she learnt from inquiring, on the Great Northern, which, of course, would not run to Hendon, and would be whirled by one long stage to Peterborough. Even if he were wise enough to follow the very best rule for people to adopt when they miss each other, namely, to quietly wait at the spot at which the separation occurred, and remain at the Farringdon Station, what, O what might he not be doing ! Conception here failed her, and a cold horror began to creep over her sensibilities. The Fakir gazed with grim benevolence on the troubled woman, and with a gentleness akin to that which might be expected from a grizzly bear in a melting mood, sought to soothe her, and offered her any assistance in his power. He 'soothed her fears, and she was calm,' and told her tale, the burden of which

was, 'Where is Gandy?' The countenance of the Fakir lighted up, and in language which certainly was not to be expected from such a being as he looked—a sort of washed-out Galileo—he exclaimed, 'Ma'am, you have come to the right shop; I can tell you anything you want to know. I am a medium, and Mr. Home is my immediate master and manipulator.' Not much did this convey to Mrs. Gandy's intelligence beyond the fact that this strange man could in some way tell her what she wanted to know; and so she eagerly begged that he would give her the promised information. His reply was odd; for he said, 'Whom would you like to summon? Mr. Gandy's mother, or the Duke of Wellington?' Still Mrs. Gandy was obtuse; but at length she was made to comprehend that in a few moments she might, if she liked, be in communication with the spirit of any one deceased whom she should choose. To say that there was no taint of terror in Mrs. Gandy's feelings when she fully understood that she was in company with a magician, who could call spirits from the vasty deep, and make them answer when he called, would be untrue; but her prevailing sensation was contemptuous incredulity, as evidenced by the exclamation, in no measured tones, of the one word, 'Bosh!' Fierce at the implied insult to his character and powers, the Fakir pressed for compliance; and Mrs. Gandy at length, in a defiant manner, said, 'Do it, if you can!' The demeanour of the medium, which hitherto had been airy and genial, though awkward and slightly rough, changed, and a solemnity and abstractedness came over him, as, apparently after some mental exercise, he gave three distinct raps on the table which stood in the room. There was a pause,

sufficiently long, as he supposed, to give time to a spirit to wing its flight to earth from another world; and then beneath the table, apart from which the Fakir then stood, came three as distinct raps as he had given on its top. There came a sudden revulsion on Mrs. Gandy's incredulity, and her characteristic boldness was merged in fear; and ere the medium could address her in order to obtain from her dictation the questions he was to put to the spirit, she fainted. She was roused by the loud voice of a porter, saying something which might mean that a train was going somewhere; and with an effort she was enabled to get into a carriage which was to convey her back to Farringdon-street, and to Gandy as she hoped. To this day Mrs. Gandy is not sure whether her encounter with the medium was a reality, or only a phantom of her brain whilst she slumbered by the fire; but if she was under the influence, there are some persons who must have often dreamed of meeting somebody who answers the description here given of the medium under circumstances which gave assurance of his being not only an actual living being, but a special eccentricity.

All this while Mr. Gandy was calmly seated on a hard bench at the station from which his wife had been carried away; employing himself first in watching, and, be it said, rather ogling the pretty girl who had attracted his attention; and when she had departed in a train the destination of which was a southern suburb, he contentedly subsided into a dozy perusal of a newspaper. Thus, in an attitude which betokens content, and an irrefragable sense of belief in Mrs. Gandy's capability of turning-up at some time or other, was he found when that anxious matron arrived, and was landed without

mishap at the station from which she had departed an hour and a half before. She did not scold Gandy; she did not spitefully attribute to him her misadventure. Her heart was softened; she had missed the man; she had gone near to mourn for him; she had a slight taste of the feeling which would come over her if Gandy had left her and the world for ever; perhaps, too, the influence of the medium was upon her. So she met him affectionately, and seemed satisfied that he had been in his usual state of harmlessness while she had been absent from him. The next thing to be done was to get to their destination. It was yet early; there was still time for a walk, which Mrs. Gandy had promised herself in a certain region, which was to her mind a sort of social empyrean; and so due preparation was made once more to essay a seat in an Edgware-road train. They were still, however, on the wrong platform. Presently from City-wards came driving in a train, which stopped with the engine westward, and all indications of its proceeding whither the Gandys were to go. Seats having been secured, there was a considerable interval, and much shouting of guards and porters, before the train moved off. Neither of the Gandys perceived that its motion was backwards, according to their exigences, instead of forwards; and so they took no heed. A stoppage at a cramped and dingy station, more shouting, and off went the train again. In another moment it was crossing the river, to the great bewilderment of the Gandys, who were however, for the time, helpless; and besides, Mrs. Gandy was drowsy, and at that moment was half-asleep; while Gandy, if fully conscious that another blunder was committed, was perhaps maliciously willing to give another shake to the sense of infallibility which

was the main feature of the character of his intolerant spouse. So he let her sleep on, until he thought the joke had been carried far enough, which was as far as Clapham Junction, and whence he calculated that, with care and good luck, they would still be able to depart in such time as to be enabled to reach the residence of the late Mr. White at six o'clock. He awakened Mrs. Gandy; who stared around when she found herself standing on a narrow platform, one of perhaps sixty, surmounted, though not covered, by a slight roof supported by thin posts, giving them the appearance of an East-Indian bungalow, with all the walls which make it a house removed, and which seemed to have been shuffled, and then thrown broadcast over what might be called a 'blasted heath' in more senses than one. These skeleton buildings afforded no shelter from rain, and were constructed so as to be pervious in a peculiar degree to every wind, blow from what quarter it would. About and around them was a wide-spread network of iron rails, crossing, recrossing, bisecting, trisecting, and every possible 'secting' each other. Far as the eye could reach, on every side that you turned, were lines of railway stretching out into infinite space; and on two-thirds of them at least there were at the same moment trains flying, as it were, at each other in a common centre, suggesting ideas of pictures one has seen of armour-clad knights urging their horses in full career against each other. Wan, heavy-eyed, and apparently distracted porters were seen, some rushing, some wandering slowly from shed to shed, but all not only sparing, but seemingly incapable of speech. The men were dazed. To Mr. and Mrs. Gandy, inquiring their way to a place in the sinuous congeries of

stations, whence they might once more seek their destination, one porter, less dizzy than his fellows, pointed with his finger to what seemed like the opening of a well which had been tossed up out of the perpendicular by an earthquake, and had assumed a slanting direction, and in ponderous accents uttered the word, 'There.' They entered; and having descended some steps, they found themselves in the centre of a series of subterranean passages, which diverged in every direction, and rivalled the rails above in their complicity and multiplicity. Generally the vaults—for such they were—reminded Mr. Gandy, dimly and in a very unsatisfactory manner, of a day when he got a 'tasting order,' and spent some hours in the Docks where wine is stored; hours joyous and exhilarating, but which were terribly reacted on by a night of horrors, with Mrs. Gandy in a fierce reproachful mood. There were inscriptions on the walls which were presumed to be intended to indicate the way to different trains, but they only served to make 'confusion worse confounded.'

Mrs. Gandy wished to go one way; Mr. Gandy, who was beginning to feel a sense of being master of the situation, insisted on going another; and at length, in the midst of a tiff, how was not readily to be explained, they separated, and began an individual wandering along the interlacing dungeon-like corridors in search of each other and of their special ticket-place. What befell Mrs. Gandy was never known; but as regarded Mr. Gandy, this happened. In his devious course he chanced to leave the level underground pathways, and ascended some steps which brought him out on a part of a platform, beside which was an exceptional, because a closed-in, structure. Through its half-open

door there gleamed ruby and green wine-glasses, and bottles, and decanters, and plated tea-urns, and all the ramshackle paraphernalia of a railway refreshment-room.

Gandy was fatigued, thirsty; and the thoughts of the day at the Docks with the 'tasting-order' had suggested a desire for a stimulant. He approached the counter. One of the 'neat-handed Phyllises' approached to her post of 'ministering angel,' when—powers eternal!—Gandy beheld the very pretty girl who had made him, metaphysically and momentarily, a traitor to the wife of his bosom. She was a typical specimen of her class: auricomous, ultra-chignonised, fair of complexion, neat of figure, becomingly dressed, and altogether pleasant to behold; unless, indeed, some too fastidious eye fell upon her hands, which were a little stumpy and red; the nails the very opposite of almond-shaped, and O, just in the very slightest mourning! Her manner was what may be called technical, peculiar to her calling, combining a willingness to be admired with a sharpness and watchfulness which implied a habit of standing at bay to compliments. The voice was pleasant, but with an indication that it could be shrill and cutting; while her language betokened some culture, except that if she asked what kind of sandwich you preferred, she invariably said, 'Am or beef, sir?' Let it not be too curiously inquired into, how it came about that in five or six minutes Gandy was to be seen in a remote corner of the room, leaning very far over the counter, looking into the eyes, which were nice eyes, of the 'pretty girl,' and murmuring in a manner which suggested there might have been a time when he was a gay deceiver.

The situation might have grown critical; but Fate, in the shape of Mrs. Gandy, intervened; for that

lady had by this time also found her way to the outlet by which Gandy before her had reached the refreshment-room. A glance was enough; she understood all, though that all was really not much. She was unaware that so far as Gandy and the pretty girl were concerned, there were antecedents; for she did not know that he had been attracted by her at the Farringdon Station. For a moment she was under the influence of that temper which had ere now caused her to adopt the species of tongue-punishment which is called in the vernacular blowing-up. But somehow her spirit was subdued. Her mistakes and mishaps had depressed her; she had not quite got over the feeling which she experienced, and which had overcome her, when at the Hendon Station she thought of an eternal separation from Gandy. In some sort she felt desolate; and, most of all, as a wanderer about Clapham Junction, she felt unutterably helpless.

Thus it happened that, when Gandy heard her voice calling on him, and he started away from the pretty girl as if she had been a serpent, and turned towards his wife, instead of meeting 'the upbraiding of her angry eye,' he saw her with a chap-

fallen expression of countenance, and altogether so subdued and meek that she could only falter out in trembling accents, 'O Gandy, can you get me away from this dreadful place?' The taming of Mrs. Cruiser was nothing to this. For once, and doubtless only for a time, Gandy, no longer a lodger in his own house, was the head of his family. With a briskness and alacrity, and with a capability of penetrating the mysteries which seemed to come to him by intuition, he took tickets for the Waterloo Station, and led his wife, nothing loth, to the right point of departure. Their luck had changed: a train was, as it were, awaiting them. In a time, to be counted by minutes, the Waterloo terminus is reached. The clock of the station points to ten minutes to six. With a hansom cab and a swift horse there is yet time. The fates are still propitious. Even such a vehicle is at hand. On, on, the goal is nearly reached. They are within a few yards. A church-clock hard by begins to strike. They are now in the narrow lane leading down to old White's house, but — there is a wagon blocking up the way in front, and — the hour has struck! They are too late.

OF A ROMANTIC YOUNG PERSON WHO FELL AMONG BRIGANDS.



MRS. B.'S FRIEND.

I SAYS to the postman, 'It certainly is for Mrs. Brown, leastways to 'er care; but,' I says, 'I ain't the only Mrs. Brown in the world, and would not take it in, only I do know a party as lived with me once as is the same name.'

Not as it were thro' 'er name being spelt Wea, not Wi, as were on that letter as I forwarded at once over to Italy, where she were a stoppin', and 'ad wrote down the address for me, as I got Miss Milders for to direct the letter over agin for over there, with one o' them furrin stamps as cost sixpence; so I knowed as it were all right, and

hoped it might be for 'er good, as they'd wrote outside 'to be forward immediate;' tho' why they should send it to me I can't think, as 'ad been a-stoppin' in my 'ouse for years.

Ah, poor thing, I always pities that 'Melia Withersleigh, and an 'ard case too for 'er, as she were a-tellin' me all about it, as preaps were too fond of novel-readin', and 'er 'ead full of them rumantic hijeas as is all rubbish arter all, tho' no sin, a-wishin' for to see one of them Italian briggins—as she said afore she started as she'd give 'er ears to, and werry nigh did give 'em, and 'er nose too, when they cotched 'er; as is a blood-thirsty lot, and if disappointed will slit your nose and ears, and cut and maim you awful, as did used to be a 'angin' matter years ago, thro' Lord Ellenburrer's hact, as is done away with now.

So I says to 'er, when she was a-tellin' me she was a-goin' to Italy, 'Don't talk to me about them Italians bein' that rumantic, as is masks of deceit and 'assinations all over;' and 'owever that Grabi-daldi could go and let all them wretches out of prison, as was all murderers and robbers, as 'ave turned into briggins, cos thro' bein' one of them 'isself he couldn't 'ave thought as they'd take warnin' by 'im, and turn their 'ands to a 'onest livin', like as he've been and done, a-keepin' goats on 'is highland 'ome, tho' I couldn't 'ear nothink of 'im in Scotland.

But the hijear of them willins not only a-robbin' you of every-think as you stands upright in, as the sayin' is, down to your werry toothbrush, and a-draggin' you out of your carriage 'ead fust in broad daylight, tho' in ginral twilight, for to take you up a mounting and keep you there prisoner for years, a-demandin' a ransom for you, jest the same as if you was a king took in battle, as they did used to be in old times, when that there Black Prince behaved that noble to that there King of France as he'd col-lared, a-waitin' on 'im at supper, as is the way with all them niggers, as is fust-rate waiters, as I've see 'em myself over in Merryker.

Ah! it's a pity as that there young prince didn't grow up to be a king, as he would 'ave been but for smallpox, as cut him off in the flower of 'is bloom, as the sayin' is, and lays berried in Redriff Churchyard, and a warnin' to all young princes, as was that pious as is in ginral a sign of never growin' up; jest the same as bein' clever, like Edward VI., as were smothered in the Tower by his uncle, the same as the Babes in the Wood; and Edward VIII., he died young too, as were a amiable prince, I've 'eard say, and no issue.

Not but what it's a bad plan for to teach young princes like that; as makes some on 'em take to wild ways like George IV., for fear of dyin' young, as in course all young people 'as a dread on, though I'm sure there's old ones as don't think no more of death bein' at 'and than if they was nineteen, and dresses like it too, as I can't bear to see myself, and is what 'Melia Withersleigh will come to if she don't take care, as is 'ard on fifty now, and talks and goes on as if she weren't out of 'er teens, as the sayin' is.

Not as it's any use 'er a-tryin' it on with me, and so I told 'er that

arternoon as she dropped in early and took a cup of tea with me jest afore 'er and Lady Goldthorp started for Italy.

For she come in all of a bustle, and says to me, 'Dear Mrs. Brown, I'm a-goin' to 'ave my 'art's desire at last!'

I says, 'Never at your time of life,' for I knowed she'd been a-dyin' to get married ever since I knowed 'er, as were over eighteen years, and she was full thirty then, and didn't try to make no concealment of 'er birth in them days, as she've been a-puttin' for'ard year after year ever since.

She say, 'O, Mrs. Brown, 'ow can you!' a-'angin' down 'er 'ead.

'Well,' I says, 'if you was to settle now with a steady widderer and no family as wanted lookin' arter, it might be a good thing for you, and a 'ome of your own, any'ow; as would be a respectable end.'

'O,' she says, a-tossin' 'er 'ead, 'I shouldn't think of such a thing. I'll marry for love, or not at all.'

'O,' I says, 'indeed!' a-wonderin' 'ow she could ever be such a fool as to think as any one could be brought to love 'er old parchment carcass.

She goes on a-sayin' as she'd been werry much annoyed by a party a-starin' at 'er in the buss, but 'ad kep' 'er wail down; and then she goes on to say, as she were a-bidden ajew to them 'busses, as 'er and Lady Goldthorp was off next week to Italy, as is the land of song.

I says, 'O, indeed;' and I says, 'It need be the land of somethink pleasant if you're a-goin' with that old catamaran, as is a mask of indigestion through 'avin' over-eat 'erself for years, to my certing knowledge, and a temper as you dursn't look at without 'er work-box, or maybe the tea-pot, at your 'ead.'

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She says, 'Well, she certingly are impetuous.'

I says, 'If that's the French for brimstone you've 'it it;' for I'd know'd the old wiper for years, thro' 'bein' fust cousin to Lady Wittles, as I lived along with ever so long when Lady Mayoress, and 'er in them days Miss Mushet, as were a fancy old maid, reg'lar on the list, and constant at the Manshun 'Ouse, as I've 'ad to undo 'er myself at scores of times arter dinner, as would dewour turtle by the quart, and couldn't never resist Birch's black-pudin's, as always did used to come in with Lord Mayor's-day.

It was all thro' 'er 'bein' so much along with Lady Wittles as Alderman Goldthorp took a fancy to 'er, as were widderer 'isself, and a only darter with the spine complaint, as died afore he settled agin; as were as well, for she wasn't no hangel in temper, and wouldn't 'ave 'ad a 'appy 'ome with 'er new ma, as would fly in them passions as I've knowed the back of 'er gownd give way sudden with a bang, thro' 'er a-swellin' with rage; and all because disappointed of a new 'ead of 'air for the Heaster ball at the Manshun 'Ouse.

She'd a fine fortune of 'er own, or else nobody wouldn't 'ave put up with 'er ways; and they do say as Alderman Goldthorp turned Baptist for to get 'er, as belonged to that persuasion, and thro' 'er 'avin' 'bein' 'eard to say as she never would marry any one as wasn't of 'er own sex. So 'ad 'im baptised over fifty, as don't seem nat'ral to 'ave a grow'd-up christenin'. So they was married and knighted that werry same year, along with Sir Samuel Wittles, thro' the Prince of Wales a-cuttin' 'is first tooth, when the Queen come to the City while they was both sheriffs.

There was a deal of talk about

'im being knighted at fust, as some did say as he didn't deserve to be, thro' 'avin' robbed 'is employers, and got off thro' a -marryin' the widder of one on 'em, as was of the Wesleyan persuasion, but always considered more rogue than fool; but what did he care as got two rich wives and rode in 'is carridge, and in course only larfed in 'is sleeve at them 'onest men as 'ad been 'is fellow-clerks, and never got enough to live on for their pains?

For there was old Mr. Wartead as told me 'imself as it made 'is blood bile to see that feller, as were a common thief, 'ob and nob, as the sayin' is, with the fust in the land, and men as knowed 'is real character a -toadyin' and shakin' 'ands with 'im; and then for that feller to be called right 'onerable as never was knowed to act neither right nor 'onerable to no one, and made thousands beggars thro' 'is swindles, as was bankrupt at last, and then went and lived in a willer at Wimbledon on 'is wife's fortin, as was thousands a-year settled on 'erself.

Not as 'bein' a knight is any great shakes, as we all knows, and some might think it a disgrace to belong to 'em, as isn't all on 'em great swells when you comes to look into 'em; and as to Italians, I considers 'em rubbish.

And so I told 'Melia Withersleigh, but she seemed all cock-a-'oop, as the sayin' is, at the chance of goin' over there, as no doubt would be glad of a change, as must 'ave 'ad a nice life a-livin' companion with Lady Goldthorp, as left Wimbledon arter 'er 'usban's death, thro' a -findin' it lonesome, and took a manshun out at the West-end, as is quite the kick, and all the hairy-stocracy a-livin' out that way, along with Mr. Shoddy the big tailor, and Mr. Ephraim the diamond-merchant, as was both arrin'-boys at fust.

I never did see such mournin' as that Lady Goldthorp put on for 'im, as was downright mockery, for she couldn't a-bear the sight on 'im, and 'adn't 'ardly spoke for years; and yet widder's crape up to 'er waist, with tons of bugles all over everything.

A nice life 'Melia 'ad with 'er, what with 'er temper and 'er dogs, with a brindled bull as would 'ang on when it bit 'er in washin' it.

Poor 'Melia! hers were a 'ard fate from the beginnin', with a drunken mother and father and two brothers as was convicts; for I knowed all about 'em thro' livin' in our street, and never shall forget them young men bein' took under their mother's bed, as 'ad both 'listed afore that.

I do think as that poor woman were drove to drink thro' misery, for the father wasn't no good, tho' a-goin' into the City every day and a-pretendin' to be a coal-merchant; and it's downright ridiculous to 'ear 'Melia talk of 'is 'avin' been a gentleman and kep a thousand barges, as never owned not even a wherry, I've 'eard say, and sold coals on commission, and died of delirous trimmins three months arter he'd berried 'is wife, as took to frettin' dreadful arter losin' 'er youngest gal in the 'oopin' cough, as certingly were a pretty child, and not the least like 'Melia, as were the eldest, and as plain as a pike-staff, as the sayin' is.

Poor thing, I always did pity 'er, she was such a hawful drudge at 'ome, and nearly cried 'er eyes out when 'er little sister died, and never 'ad 'ardly a bit of shoe to 'er foot nor yet a decent rag to 'er back till she was left alone in the world, as was when I took 'er in for three months; and she got a start in life thro' goin' to wait upon a young lady as were a invalid as never left the sofy, and stopped there over twelve year, and left 'er

twenty pounds a-year out of gratitude, but reg'lar spilte 'er for 'ard work.

In course she couldn't get on with only that, with 'er 'ead as is that full of fancies thro' a-readin' all manner, and got a-talkin' about a rich relation of 'er mother's as were goin' to adopt and marry 'er.

Till at last I said to 'er one day, when she was a-talkin' a deal of rubbish about 'im, 'Don't you wait for 'im no longer, but take the fust offer as you gets, and be thankful.'

I think that speech put 'er out a bit, and I didn't see 'er for a good bit, till she come to tell me about a-goin' over to Italy, and she says to me at partin', 'if any letter should come for me, you must send it to me at once.'

I says, 'wherever to? for Italy's a large place I've 'eard say, as might be a long while a-getting a letter to.'

'Oh,' she says, 'post restin' will find any one; but I'll write it down on a card, and mind as you copies it all correct.'

I says, 'all right,' never expectin' as no letter would ever come for 'er, and off she goes, and never 'eard anythink of 'er for months, till that letter came for 'er, as I sent off post 'aste as the sayin' is; as is the same thing no doubt as post restin' over there.

It was about a fortnight arter sendin' that letter, as I 'eard no more on, till one night, jest as I was a-thinkin' about goin' to bed early thro' a bad cold in my 'ead, and Brown bein' away, I 'eard a sharp knock, and says, 'Who's there?' from my bedroom winder, and see it were a cab, and if it wasn't 'Melia come back all of a 'urry.

So I goes down to the door myself and let 'er in, as kissed me both sides of my night-cap borders, as is foreign ways, and says, 'I'm come back, like the little bird, to its mother's nest.'

I says, 'I wish as a little bird 'ad told me you was a-comin', for the spare bed aint ready, with all the crockery piled a-top on it, and the room all of a uproar, as the sayin' is; but,' I says, 'come in to the fire,' as luckily I 'adn't raked out. So she pays the cab, and in she come, without no luggage to speak on.

Of all the figgers as ever I did see, it was that woman, as was dressed out like any one as were a-goin' to dance with the sweeps, and no sweep ever weren't more begrimed. I says, 'Wherever 'ave you come from?'

'O,' she says, 'Italy post 'aste, and 'aven't 'ardly 'ad my clothes off since Naples. Where I got the letter as you sent me from my cousin's lawyer, as am come into my fortin, such good luck.'

'Well, then,' I says, 'you shall 'ave lots of 'ot water, and make yourself comfortable afore you says another word;' and as the gal 'ad asked leaf for to set up and finish 'er gownd as she was workin' at, so there was a good fire, and the biler fills itself, it wasn't no great trouble to get 'er a bath.

I'm sure I'm glad as I made 'er do it, for never did I 'ear of sich goin's on as she'd 'ad to put up with, and all thro' them Italians, as is nothink better than common thieves, tho', in course, it sounds grander for to be called briggrins, as is the French for it, as I'm sure only means the same as priggins in Hinglish.

It certingly were werry 'eadstrong of 'Melia to come away from over there late at night, and start off sudden, with nobody but the currier as did used to ride in the rumble, as is a free lot all the world over; for I've 'eard Mrs. Padwick say, when she lived lady's-maid with one of the Bishop of Bermondsey's ladies, as I think were 'is third, and crossed the Halps in their own carriage, she was put up

behind with a feller as wore a 'airy cap and gold ear-rings, as made that free as she 'ad to scratch 'is face, and kick that wiolent as the rumble come off, and would 'ave been left behind in a mounting torrent, only the shock woke up the bishop, as stopped the 'orses, and give that fellow the sack on the spot.

In course Lady Goldthorp she didn't wish 'Melia to leave in that 'urry; but she 'adn't no choice, for them lawyers is sich downright tyrants; not as they could 'elp it, thro' its bein' left that way in old White's will, as were the rich relation as 'Melia 'd always been a-blowin' about, tho' she'd never 'eard 'is name, as 'ad been took sudden, leavin' 20,000/. behind, as were to be divided among 'is relations, leastways sich of 'em as should present theirselves in time at 'is late residence, as were to be within a month of the reseat of that letter.

'Owever they was to reckon that I should like to know, tho' in course doctors and lawyers can do anything atween 'em when there's property in the question, as 'll swear black is white, and white no colour, as the sayin' is.

For I'm sure me and Brown did ought to 'ave rode in our carriage years and years ago, if all the money 'ad come to us by rights, as might but for them as died with no wills of their own, and medicine enough to kill a bullock, like old Miss Buteel, as is the reason I always says, 'Make your will in 'ealth, and call in the fust advice, and never pamper with your 'ealth and only a chimist and druggist.'

Well, as I was a-sayin', 'Melia 'ad been put upon frightful by that old cat Lady Goldthorp, as insulted 'er down to the ground, through 'Melia bein' that rumantic-like, a-fancyin' 'erself young and beautiful; and as all them Italians was in love with 'er through bein' that fair as

was like a old wax-doll, with a wisp of 'air a yallerish white, as looked that thin and wretched as if it 'adn't the strength to turn gray.

As to figger, poor thing, she 'adn't no more than a cane-chair, with feet a mile too long for 'er legs, and pick-axe 'eeled.

In course, as soon as she got the lawyer's letter, as were in the evening, she wanted to start off at once; and as there wasn't no railroad near where they was a-stoppin', 'ad to get a ram-shackle old carridge, as they called a wetteriner; and so it proved, a-lettin' the rain in all over; and that there currier said as he'd go along with 'er for to protect 'er agin them brigings.

Well, this put the old lady in a fury, as insiniwated as it weren't correct for 'Melia to go alone with 'im, as was downright foolishness, and only nasty spite to think of anybody else a-mindin' it if the currier didn't.

No sooner did 'Melia 'ear about brigings bein' about than she was madder than hever to be off; for as she'd told me 'erself, that if there were a thing as she longed to set eyes on in this world it were a real live briggin a-reclinin' on a rock.

Lady Goldthorp reg'lar raved at 'er when she come to say good-bye, as 'ad been insultin' of 'er gross ever since they started, a-goin' on about 'er parents, as 'Melia were werry foolish to say anythink about, but would be always a-braggin' about them a bein' reg'lar upper crust.

I didn't never used to make 'er no answer when she come that rubbish with me; for I knowed werry well as 'er father were nothink but a fraudilient bankrupt, and 'er mother 'ad been brought up to the straw-plattin' business somewheres near St. Albans.

But in course, whatever your parents may be, you don't like bein' insulted over 'em, cos we can't all

be berried in Westminster Abbey. So when the old lady give tongue that insultin' to 'Melia, she turned round on 'er that werry evenin', in a ridin'-'abit and a green wail as she was a-goin' to travel in, and says, 'You'll please to keep your remarks to yourself, Lady Goldthorp, and not talk to me, as was always your superior in birth and hedication, and am now your equal in money.'

The old woman was took by surprise. She give a scream, never expecting a worm to turn like that, and fell back on the sofy, and werry nigh squashed 'er pet-dog, as were layin' behind 'er, with 'er weight; and then if 'Melia didn't go on at 'er, a-tellin' 'er as 'ow 'er own father weren't no better than a common thief, as 'ad made 'is money through insurin' wessels when he knowed as they was wrecks; 'and as to your 'usband,' she says, 'it's well known as he might 'ave been transported over and over agin.'

The old woman 'ad jest strength for to shy the lamp at 'Melia, as missed 'er and deluged the place in ile; and then went off in a fit, as 'Melia didn't wait to see 'er out on, but started in that wetteriner, as were a old rickety carriage with no winders, but leather curtings round it as wouldn't draw proper, and fowls 'ad been a-roostin' in it for months, and the rain a-comin' down intorrently.

That currier chap, he sat outside along with the coachman, as 'ad 'anded 'Melia in; quite perlite, as she told me, a-kissin' 'er 'and and a-callin' 'er 'is beautiful blondiner, as means any one as is fair over there; but 'ow she could be such a fool as to think as any man could look at 'er without a shudder puzzles me.

The road was hawful bad, reg'lar feather-bed lanes as the sayin' is, with rucks that deep as kep' a-

sendin' 'Melia a-flyin' about as if she'd a been in a dice-box, and pretty nigh knocked all 'er teeth out, as was screwed in with gold wires, with bruises as big as cheese-plates all over 'er.

The 'orses was werry wild in their ways, and kep' a-screamin' and a-plungin' about till they come to a werry 'illy part, and 'Melia thinks as she must 'ave dropped off asleep, when all of sudden there come a wiolent lurch like, and the carriage pretty nigh went over, and there was a great confusion and a-firin' of guns; and poor 'Melia set up a yellin' and a screamin', as brought a lot of fellers round the carriage, as dragged 'er out that wiolent, enough to break 'er bones, and crammed a beastly 'ankercher into 'er mouth, blindfolded 'er eyes, and tied 'er 'ands behind 'er back.

Poor 'Melia, she said as she never were so frightened in all 'er life, and yet didn't seem afraid; as was all 'er foolery, for she was that idgiotical as to believe as them fellers, if they was briggins, wouldn't 'urt but must admire 'er.

They throwed 'er down like lumber in a ditch, while they was a-riflin' 'er boxes, and she could 'ear 'em all a-jaggerin' and a-going on, and fancied as she 'eard that currier talkin'; but that could not 'ave been so, thro' 'im bein' gagged too, as she see 'im arterwards with 'er own eyes.

Well, arter a bit, them wagger-bones pick 'er up, and took and throwed 'er across a mule or a some-think, as tho' she'd been a sack, with 'er 'ead 'angin' down, and off they set at a trot as nearly dislocated 'er.

She'd managed to get the 'ankercher out of 'er mouth arter a bit, but didn't dare to scream for fear as they should fire on 'er, but felt as if 'er 'ead would soon be shook off; and so went on ever so long up a werry steep place, as the road

was dreadful bad, thro' the beast as she were on a-stumblin' about a good deal, as made the feiler as were leadin' 'im fetch 'im wiolent cracks, as every now and then as missed the hanimal and ketched 'Melia a nutty one by mistake, as give 'er hagony.

Poor thing, she ain't no consumption how long she was on that there beast, as turned out a mule, when more dead than alive she were took off and carried like a sack of coals on a man's back into a place as smelt werry choky, and then was pitched down in a corner and 'ad 'er eyes unbandaged.

Of all the miserable 'oles as ever she did see, she says it was the wust, with a bit of charcoal fire a-burnin', and a miserable light, and such a old 'ag a-fryin' some-think.

The place were like a sort of a stable, and smelt dreadful, and was hawful dirty. 'Melia was a-settin' on a old sack, more dead than alive, as seemed full of dead leaves, a-espectin' death every hinstant; and jest then she see 'em bring in that currier, with 'is harms tied and gagged, as give 'er a look not to notice 'im. As in course she didn't, through always bein' one as could take a hint.

She 'adn't set long there afore the old ooman give 'er a touch, and made signs as she should foller 'er, as she did, into a place as was only fit for a pig to live in, and wouldn't never thrive in, I should say; and there she throwed down that sack as 'Melia 'ad been a-settin' on, and give 'er a bit of bread as black and stale as could be, and a few olives as was as black as the bread a-swimmin' in ile, and some water as tasted muddy out of a sort of a jar as was begrimed with dirt, so 'Melia couldn't eat nor drink nothink.

There was a bit of a light a-burnin', but it soon went out arter

the old ooman was gone; and 'Melia 'ad to wait there till daylight, as was espectin' sudden death and no mercy every hinstant, though she kep' a-fallin' asleep and a-dreamin' about the fortune as she were come into, with the rain a-comin' down cats and dogs, as the sayin' is.

She didn't know what o'clock it was when she 'eard someone a-whisperin' close to 'er 'ead, as woke 'er up; and she 'ollers, 'Who's there?' As proved to be that 'ere 'Tonio, as he called 'isself, as were the currier's name, as told 'er he'd managed for to come on the quiet to say as she must send to Lady Goldthorp for money for to be set free; as in course was werry 'ard lines, through 'er 'avin' parted with the old lady in 'igh words, as shows 'ow foolish it is for to fall out with anybody in this world, as you never can tell when you may want 'em.

So, arter a deal of talk, it were agreed as 'Tonio should get 'er a light and a bit of paper for to write, and told 'er to name a pretty 'igh sum, as they wouldn't take a farthing under five 'undred, through a-knowin' as she were a airess as 'ad come into property.

'Owever they could 'ave knowed it, no one couldn't tell, though that there 'Tonio said as all the letters was opened at the post-office, the same as they do say was once on a time done by one Rowling 'Ill, as I've 'eard my dear mother speak on as a wonderful preacher over by the New Cut, as said in 'is sermon as 'is wife 'ad a chest of drawers on 'er 'ead, illudin' to 'er bonnet, as shows he 'adn't much in 'is 'ead, in my opinion; and that's 'ow he come to open the letters, preaps.

Well, poor 'Melia didn't know what to do; for she could 'ear them briggins a-goin' on a-kickin' up a row outside, as was, no doubt, a-carousin' over their prey like wild-beasts, as I'm sure wouldn't never

'ave touched 'Melia, through 'er bein' a bag of bones, and not tender by no means, though they do say the nearer the bone, the sweeter the meat, as I don't believe; for I've knowed a j'int myself as were all right except near the bone, where it was a little bit touched.

So she took and wrote on a bit of paper, and gave it to that 'Tonio, and I think it was over two days as 'Melia told me she were shet up in that place as 'adn't no winder, but only a 'ole in the roof, without a change, or even a clean pocket-anckercher to 'er back, and 'ardly nothink to eat but some parched peas and a bit of fennel-root and bread; and 'ardly no clothes on but a old cloak, for that old ooman 'ad took away 'er ridin'-abit and stockin's; and as to all 'er other things, they'd been tore off 'er back by them briggins at fust, down to the gold-wires out of 'er ears; and it's a mercy as they didn't take the gold off 'er teeth.

Of all the ugly, dirty, ill-looking willins, 'Melia says, it was them briggins, as looked like parties as mends the roads, and never washes theirselves.

Leastways, as far as she see; for she only ketched sight of two or three on 'em at a distance, the arter noon as they let 'er go, as were on a old mule as lame as a tree, as the sayin' is, as were led by a boy; and what 'Melia says were so 'orrid to think on were, that there was no signs of that poor 'Tonio, as must 'ave been murdered.

So 'Melia kep' a-askin' for 'im, for she couldn't a-bear to leave 'im behind; but law, she couldn't make that boy nor the old ooman understand a word, and as to the rest they wouldn't come near her.

She didn't know what was a-goin' to 'appen to 'er after they'd started ever so long, till that boy stopped the mule with a jerk at 'is 'ead, and pulled 'Melia off, jumped on it

'isself sudden, and went off quite brisk, a-leavin' 'Melia alone; as showed that mule was as deceitful as the rest, and could go when he liked.

It was a lonesome sort of a place where 'Melia was left, close agin a sort of 'orse-trough, as was a blessin', for she could dip 'er face in it; but couldn't think what was to be the end on 'er as daylight were a-closin', when she 'eard wheels, and up come a carriage as it turned out was sent for 'er, with a party in it as spoke Hinglish, as told 'er that Lady Goldthorp 'ad paid a 'undred pounds for 'er to be set free, as 'ad been left on a stone by the roadside that werry day, as they wasn't to touch till she'd started.

So 'Melia 'ad to go back to Lady Goldthorp, as received 'er werry cool, a-sayin' with a sneer as she 'oped she'd 'ad enough of briggins, as she'd wanted to see so much.

It's lucky as railways was found out in Italy, or 'Melia never could 'ave got away, for the sea was a-bilin' over with storms, and certin' death to any one as wentured out in a boat, and even the railway was a good bit off; so she'd a long ride the next mornin', and obligated for to borrar clothes of Lady Goldthorp's maid, as could only spare 'er a change, and off she set, frightened out of 'er life all along the road, thinkin' as everythink were a briffin a-lurkin', and when she did get to the railway if it wasn't gone, and 'ad to wait seven 'ours for the next, and so on a-travellin' night and day up and down the Halps, as is turned into a tunnel part of the way, but that full of smoke as were pretty nigh suffercation, and that cold like icebugs all round you, and obligated to get out at one place and walk up to 'er knees in slush in the middle of the night,

and got to Paris more dead than alive, and come on straight without a-stoppin', and was a-crossin' from Calais as sick as a dog, as the sayin' is, and if the steamer wasn't run slap ashore at Dover, through the engineers a-bein' drunk, and it's a mercy as they wasn't all drownded, for the steamer turned over on to its side, and 'Melia was only brought ashore through bein' lifted up by a 'itcher in 'er waistband, as it's a mercy it didn't give way, for if it 'ad been me, my weight would never 'ave stood it in this world.

I never shall forget the figger as she come to my door, as it's a wonder as any cabman would bring 'er; and I'm sure no 'otel would 'ave took 'er in, with no luggage, only a paper parcel as were all a-breaking loose, as is jest like that old Goldthorp, as ain't no more a lady than I'm a buck 'orse, as the sayin' is.

I thought as 'Melia never would 'ave gone to sleep, arter a good wash and a bit of supper, a-tellin' me all 'er sorrers, as made the time pass, as it were, jest on two, when I got into bed, and kep' a-dreamin' of them briggins and all manner, as were no doubt thro' a-taking a bit of-supper along with 'Melia for company's sake, as 'ad to be up in good time the next mornin' thro' it's bein' the werry day as she were bound to be at 'er cousin's 'ouse, or else too late for 'er share.

A nice job I 'ad to dress 'er up in my things, as it took pins by the paper for to make 'em fit 'er, as is no more figger than a clothes-prop, but looked werry genteel in slight mournin', as I 'ad by me, thro' bein' a gray gownd and a black mantilla, and a widder's bonnet as belonged to Brown's aunt, as I'd kep' by me; and shows as 'ow you didn't never ought to throw anythink away, as you never can tell when they may come in 'andy.

I do believe as that poor hobjec' 'Melia were pleased to wear that bonnet; for she says to me a-smilin', 'I shouldn't make sich a bad widow, should I?'

'Ah,' I says, 'you can't never be that thro' never bein' a wife.' But law, there's no tellin' what may 'appen now you've got money, for men are sich willins and women sich fools, like a fancy old maid as I 'eard tell on some years ago, as lived up High Park way, as took and married 'er butler over heighty; as pretty nigh drove 'er nevvies and nieces mad, as tried to make 'er out a lunatic, but couldn't; for that butler he were wide awake enough, as were a common feller, though some of them in the neighbour'ood as did used to eat the old ooman's dinners said he was quite superior to 'is class; as I should say were parlymentary all over.

So off she set, a-smilin' and a-kissin' 'er 'and to me out of the cab winder; and I was glad to think as she were provided for, poor thing, and only 'oped as no blackguard wouldn't get 'old of 'er and rob 'er, as is werry often what 'appens to such as 'er, as is 'eat up with foolishness, and them lawyers always 'as their eyes on.

In less than a 'our she were back agin, a-lookin' as blank as a idjot, and begun a-roarin' and cryin', and well she might, for it were all a mistake, and that letter were never intended for 'er, nor yet to my care, as were the postman's fault, as said he'd never 'eard tell of any Mrs. Brown but me.

So poor 'Melia 'ad been made a reg'lar fool on, as I must say served 'er partly right, thro' 'avin been tellin' lies all about 'er rich relation, as were all my eye, and a-bildin' castles in the hair as the sayin' is, for she never 'ad such a

article belongin' to 'er, and 'ad to rite sich a 'umble letter to Lady Goldthorp, and got a buster back for a answer.

For she wrote a-saying 'ow she longed for to fly back to 'er kind pertectress, a-saying as she'd been cruelly wronged, and were in the wide world alone.

The old lady didn't rite herself, as were as much as she could do to sign 'er name, but 'er maid 'ad rote the letter and give it 'Melia 'ot, a-saying it were all rubbish about them briggins, as were all a trick of that waggerbone of a currier.

Says 'Melia: 'I never will believe my 'Tonio false, as is all that old wixen's spite, as were always jealous of 'is admirin' me.'

I says, 'For goodness' sake, 'Melia, give up that rubbish, or you'll make a wuss fool of yourself than ever; but,' I says, 'will the old woman 'ave you back, and look over the 'undred pounds?'

She says, 'No; she only sends me word as she won't press me for it; and as to my bein' in the world alone, she don't care where I am so as I don't come near 'er, as is brutal.'

'Well,' I says, 'then the best thing as you can do, is to look out for a situation, and give up all your tom-foolery, and then you'll be respected in your hold hage.'

Poor thing, she was werry down for a day or two, but was cheered up thro' 'earin' of a somethink thro' Mrs. Padwick, as were likely to suit 'er, in the companion line, as she wrote and told me she'd got, and with 'er little means will live comfortable the rest of 'er life, and never 'ave no more thoughts of love, and briggins, and 'Tonios, and fortins, and all that rubbish, as 'ave turned many a 'ead besides 'ern.

OF A GENTLEMAN WITH A MOUS- TACHE WHO CAME ON PURPOSE.



NELL.

RICHARD DARELL, Esq.,—well known to a miscellaneous *canaille* of Bond-street tradesmen, Regent-street gentlemen of the Hebrew and 'accommodating' persuasion, *et hoc genus omne*, as a junior member of the Warwickshire Darells, at present of 22A Half-Moon-street, Piccadilly, and rather shy of the said *hoc genus omne*,—was perhaps recognised under more favourable auspices by a tolerant society as 'Dandy' Darell of the Pelham and 'Rally' Clubs; of the Row, the Corner, Truefitt's and Piver's shops, Paris, Hom-bourg, Brussels, and all 'the best houses' in the season.

His listless handsome face and big blonde moustache were known more favourably to pretty, well-dressed women, wherever their owner condescended to show, than to Ephraim Moses, of Clarendon Chambers, Regent-street, financial agent, or the Messrs. Tightfit and Waddy, tailors, of Old Bond-street.

Yes, this is the real state of the case: at the present moment Dandy Darell's pecuniary position as regarded things in general was decidedly a bad one.

It is just twelve A.M.; the middle of the day to prosaic humdrum nobodies, but the legitimate time of its commencement to Mr. Darell.

The Dandy's quarters in Half-Moon-street are as deliciously comfortable as tick largely indulged in at a fashionable upholsterer's can render them. The lounge-chair which he is now occupying is a master-piece in its way.

'Ye-es,' he would tell his friends who complimented him upon it, 'I really do believe that chair—carry it about with me wherever I go, you know—has had the formation of my character. How the doose can a fellow *do* anything who's got that chair to sit in? I've had it six years, and I've never done nothing yet, except sit in it, don't you know?'

The Dandy has finished his breakfast, and, cigar in mouth, is lazily contemplating a pile of unopened letters on the table beside his elbow. The cigar is smoked right through, then he takes them slowly up one by one.

'Tell you what it is, old fellow,' he says—he has a curious habit of talking to himself, which he excuses by saying that it's much less trouble than talkin' to another fellow—'can leave off when you like, don't you see?'

'Tell you what it is, you'll have to exert yourself, my boy; this sort of thing can't go on much longer.'

Here he picks out four largish blue envelopes with the unmistakable trade-mark upon them. Then he rings the bell. It is answered by a man-servant, whose face is only remarkable for its entire absence of any expression whatever.

'He don't *look* it,' Darell would say, 'but he *knows* a lot.'

'You've seen these, West, I suppose?' the Dandy said, as the man came noiselessly up to the table.

The valet took up the four blue envelopes, and examined their writing without a word.

'Only bills,' he said laconically.

'Then where's Moses's writ?'

The man turned over the pile of letters, and picked out a long pink envelope, with an elaborate monogram and unmistakably feminine handwriting.

'Here,' he said, holding it up to the light.

'Ah,' said the Dandy, looking at it approvingly, 'that's clever, now, of old Ephraim—didn't give him credit for *that* move—quite sure, though?'

'Certain; worked the same game on to Major Vane, and took *him* in. It's only an accident, sir, as I knows it.'

'Good; then just put it in another envelope as it is, and send it back to Mr. Moses, with my compliments. Much obliged, West—that'll do. It won't last though,' continued the Dandy meditatively; 'it *can't*—much longer. Really must make up my mind to *do* something. Here am I now, six and twenty—not such a fool as I look. Five years

ago came into just three thousand pounds, spent it; allowance from family four hundred; can't live under eight—consequences, tick. Then Jews, then—*here I am*. Let's see now. The governor wants me to go in for the fam'ly living; always kept, says the governor, for the younger son. I'm the younger son, consequence—fam'ly living. Not if I know it. Sermon-writing, old women—visiting, tracts, tea, and turnip-fields. Pah! Mater says, army—wonderful how fond women are of red cloth. Not if I know it, ditto. Parade at seven, country garrison—almost like parson and the turnip business—perhaps too, India, or worse, Jamaica and Canada—quite out of the betting. Household Brigade very well, in town, but can't afford *that*. Uncle James says, Bar. Bosh, simple nonsense! But, 'pon my soul, must do *something*. What's to-day?—23d. Jove! next Wednesday's Christmas-day; and I haven't answered one of the Christmas letters yet. Good thought! go and stop somewhere for Christmas time, and see if something won't turn up there. *I will*. Let me see now; the paternal roof-tree is deserted—family wintering in Rome. That's no go. Mrs. Dunbar, Charlwood Park. H'm! old D. has *the* wonderfulest claret, but can't stand Mrs. D.—no, hanged if I can. No go again. Lady Storks; here's her epistle; "*delighted* if you will come. Julia is *dying* for the private theatricals you so kindly *promised* to superintend." Let her die. Can't stand Julia—all the Storks' girls *down* upon one so, and there's no tin to speak of. Hah, from old Chuffey, "Come and stop as long as you like, my boy, and I'll tell you some more of *those stories*—you know?" *I know!* I should think I *did*, rather. No, no, Chuffey: this child don't *want* to know what went on in Calcutta in '39, though your Madeira *is* the

right stuff. Ah, this is more like it. From Mrs. Capel-Capel. Let's see, h'm.

'Capel Court, Bradgate, York.

'MY DEAR MR. DARELL,—Just a few lines to remind you of your *promise* to come to us for the Christmas week. Should Capel-court and its inhabitants proper not offer sufficient inducements (though you should *know* how glad *I* shall be to see you, dear Dick, yes, *for this once*), I am in the position to assure you that Miss Bompas, the great Yorkshire heiress, you know, will be stopping here. I shall be *so* glad *indeed* to see you well out of your present pecuniary embarrassments (so *nice* of you to *confide* in me), and here is a great chance. You, who can do *anything* with women—I am not flattering you, Dick—surely could marry poor Miss Bompas, who is not *very* clever. So come by all means.—Your always affectionate friend,

'KATE CAPEL-CAPEL.'

The Dandy lit another cigar, and puffed away meditatively.

'A nice woman, *la belle* Kate—was rather (puff) *épris* there myself before she finally decided on Capel-court; quite (puff) right of her too; always (puff) sensible woman. Fine place, Capel-court; comfortable house, large fires, no draughts, good cook, capital cellar; (puff) pretty hostess, and—Miss Bompas (puff, puff). Yes, *and*—Miss Bompas! Tom Fletcher told me (puff) other day the Bompas would have a clear four thousand perann.—Irish mortgages and Indian Railways (puff, puff, puff). Yes, I'll go to Capel-court. Didn't mean to marry yet. Better than making up one's mind about a profession though. Besides a profession's doosid hard work and little pay; just three to one too, if I got on in anything. Don't know what I *could* do, I'm sure, except a

Jew. By the way, that's Fletcher's joke—'

Here our hero's meditations were interrupted by the entrance of his man, who placed a note on the table and was about to withdraw again, when the Dandy called him back.

'I'm going out of town to-morrow, West.'

The man made a slight motion with his head to show that he heard.

'Down to Capel-court, you know—Yorkshire. I'm going down there because Miss Bompas is stopping in the house, and I want to marry her, you see?'

The valet made the same motion with his head, and glanced, as if involuntarily, at the letter he had just brought, which was lying close to his master's elbow on the table.

The other noticed his look directly, and took it up.

A momentary contraction of the brows told the man that his master had recognised the handwriting.

'May I ask, sir, if you *now* will go to Capel-court?' and West's eyes again wandered to the letter.

The Dandy frowned impatiently.

'Certainly,' he said, with the nearest approach to irritation he ever allowed himself. 'D'ye think *this* will keep me? *You* know the state of the money-market pretty well, West; can I afford *this* sort of thing *now*,' and he tapped the letter with the butt-end of his cigar.

West shrugged his shoulders—he knew the Dandy too well to venture on a verbal contradiction—and turned again to leave the room.

'You will see that everything is ready to start this time to-morrow.'

'Yes, sir. Do I accompany you?'

'No, you will remain; look after the place; take care none of those fellows get an execution on the furniture. I think I'd rather lose the Bompas herself than this chair.'

'You *will* marry Miss Bompas, then.'

'Confound it, yes.'

'Very well, sir.'

'West.'

'Sir.'

'You're a good fellow.'

'Thank you, sir,' and the imperturbable valet withdrew.

'Yes,' said the Dandy, when the door closed behind his servant, 'the fellow wishes to do a good turn for once in a way. I like the poor child—yes, I do, very much. But it can't be helped—it's just this: Bompas or the bailiffs. Poor Nellie must go to the wall, I'm afraid. Let me read her letter now.' He opened the letter and read this:

'DEAREST OWN DICK,—Will you come round to-night—the new bally is over at 10 & I'll come down—I go on again about 11-15, but do come O dick how I do love you with all my heart and soul dick & I feel so sad sometimes. i don't know why dear but last night I dream of you & you said you was goin away a long long way and then I woke up cryin O Dick you will come wont you—with dear Love

'I am your Very own little
'NELL.'

He read it through twice; then going to a chiffonier, took out a bottle labelled Cognac, and drank off a wine-glassful.

'I do believe,' he said slowly, as if he had just solved a difficult problem, 'I do believe I love that child because she's so *good*; for she *is* good, by George! good as gold.

A little after ten o'clock that night the Dandy might have been seen standing near a 'liquor-bar,' in a low-ceilinged species of saloon under the stage of the Royal Pandemonium Music Hall.

The Dandy was, as he always was, essentially the Dandy, a very good-looking dandy too; at least the young person then talking to him thought so, in which opinion she was supported by divers other

young persons there congregated about.

The particular young person to whom the Dandy was devoting himself, or rather allowing himself to be *devoted to*, was in years about eighteen or thereabouts. She was clad in a long gray cloak reaching below the knees; pink 'tights' appeared under the cloak, terminating in bright emerald kid boots, fanciful as to buckles and prodigal of heels; her hair was so profuse as to require no wig, and the big gray eyes that were fastened on Mr. Darell were very beautiful. They were eyes which one sees, if one is lucky, once in a lifetime, and they contained in their wondrous depths a sort of liquid *light* as of tears unshed; and though this young person, not to mince matters, was a member of the *corps de ballet*, her great eyes had the expression of a wondering startled child.

Presently a bell rings, the young lady in the gray cloak puts out a tiny well-shaped hand to Mr. Darell, who says, 'Then good-bye, Nellie.'

The light in the girl's eyes becomes very bright, and you could imagine it taking the form and semblance of tears; but if they are such, they keep their place bravely, and she trips off without a word to her duties as a Young Man of the Period *temps* Queen Elizabeth; in another five minutes she is dancing briskly round a maypole with the lime-light full on her, and, of course, in a state of happiness befitting the circumstances.

The Dandy lounging quietly out of the building some ten minutes afterwards, comes face to face with his man West, imperturbable as usual.

'Moses's men are here, sir,' said the valet quietly. 'Saw 'em not three minutes ago.—Cab!' he called out quickly; '*there they are, sir*; make a bolt for it.'

No sooner said than done.

As two men came hurriedly out of a door-way, the Dandy sprang into a hansom, which had just pulled up at the kerb. The driver saw the state of affairs at a glance, and went off at a furious gallop, the men, who had hailed and entered another cab, following. The Dandy had barely time to enter and close his street-door before the pursuing cab pulled up.

West coming quietly in some ten minutes afterwards, found his master lounging in his favourite chair as unconcerned as though such personages as sheriffs' officers did not exist for him.

The Dandy's arrangements for leaving town the following day were frustrated; Moses's men kept such diligent watch, that escape with safety from Half-Moon-street was an impossibility. Christmas-day came and went, the siege at No. 22A being maintained with unremitting vigilance. Ephraim Moses had been greatly exasperated at the failure of his pink envelope ruse, and had vowed, with much bad language, to 'have the Dandy, or he'd know the reason why.'

Many were the cunning traps and insidious devices Moses's men employed to entice the besieged one from his lair, but with no success; both master and man knew tricks quite equal to those of the enemy.

More than three weeks passed away and the Dandy was still at Half-Moon-street, unable to make an escape. He had written time after time to Capel-court excusing his going there; and not only was he getting thoroughly sick of the confinement to his lodgings, but the principal inducement at Capel-court would be withdrawn. In another week or so *Miss Bompas would be leaving*.

What was to be done? Miss B. was now his only hope of redemp-

tion. More creditors came swooping down upon him every day. Half-Moon-street was patrolled by seedy-looking men, with wonderful powers of vision and tenacity of purpose.

At this juncture the young person from the Royal Pandemonium came to his relief.

One morning West brought his master this epistle:

'DEAR DICK,—i have thought of a cappital Plan which is this. you know fanny Wilmot in the front row in the new bally—you know she is very Tall and plays young men *always*—now why not let her come with me to yr place with a soot of her cloathes in a Bag, you put them on and her Wig you must *shave* yr Moostache off and then go out with me in a cab. if you think this Will do we will come the Day after to-morrow.'

Mr. Darell, after some reflection, principally with reference to the blonde moustache, thought it *would* do.

Three evenings after the receipt of the above letter, two young ladies, with that *je ne sais quoi* air about them that always denotes 'the profession,' knocked at the door of 22A Half-Moon-street, and were admitted by Mr. Darell's factotum. An hour later the same two ladies—to all appearance—came out again. The taller of the two, however, who was arrayed in a plain 'stuff,' a velveteen jacket, a piquant pork-pie with white feather, and displayed a profusion of long flaxen ringlets, was our friend the Dandy; whilst the young gentleman who lazily twirled a blonde moustache as he presented himself to the gaze of divers sheriffs' officers from the first-floor windows was Miss Fanny Wilmot of the Royal Pandemonium, now absent from that establishment under the plea of a 'severe bronchial affection.'

On the evening of the 29th of January—more than four weeks after he had ‘made-up his mind’ to go down to Capel-court in the hope of something turning-up there—the Dandy found himself in a first-class at Euston-square, *at last actually about to start.*

A bitterly cold night it was, but he was well wrapped up, and as the train cleared slowly out of the station, was congratulating himself on the way he had ‘done’ the bailiffs; they must quite have lost sight of him by this time. Poor Nellie, though, what a goodchild she was! Heigho! well, he couldn’t really afford it, unless indeed something turned up; and then ten to one the something would sure to turn up—*wrong way.* Bompas, or something, he’d have to go in for *au sérieux.* Well, it was *kismet*; but he wished it wasn’t quite so doosid cold. It was snowing hard all the night, and when the Dandy reached his destination at ten the following morning, he was feeling about as thoroughly uncomfortable as any one well could. The large fire burning cheerfully in his room, and the intelligence that ‘the Bompas’ was still stopping in the house, however, went some way to console him.

He was thawing himself at the fire, and becoming generally of a more genial frame of mind as visions of a good breakfast and ‘the Bompas’ rose before him, when a knock came at the door, and a man brought in a large yellow letter.

The Dandy saw at once that it was a telegram.

‘It came,’ the man said, ‘just after Mr. Darell himself arrived.’

‘*John West, 22A Half-Moon-street, Piccadilly, to Richard Darell, Capel-court, Bradgate, Yorkshire.*

‘A letter has just come for you, which I opened according to your instructions. It is from Joseph

Badger of Taffy’s Inn, solicitor, stating that your mother’s half-brother, Isaac White, of Low-tide-street, Riverside, West Strand, is dead, and that you must attend *personally* to-morrow, the 31st instant.’

‘Pleasant this,’ said the Dandy. ‘Just got here—more dead than alive—expected to go back again by return of post, eh? What, leave old Capel’s famous game-pie after ten hours’ rail, snow, and nothin’ to eat; also — “the Bompas?” Don’t you believe it.’

The station was only a short mile from Capel-court, and he sent back a telegram at once.

‘*Richard Darell, Capel-court, to John West, 22A Half-Moon-street, Piccadilly, London.*

‘*Must I really come?*

Before the Dandy had finished an elaborate breakfast, during which he **had already made** good running with ‘the Bompas,’ also the game-pie, he **received an answer.**

‘Yes.’

‘No help for it now,’ he said to his hostess. ‘Know my man West so well, don’t you see; when he says must, he *means* must.’

In twenty minutes more the Dandy, growling much to himself, was on his way back to town.

‘What the doose is it?’ he thought. ‘S’posin’ the old fellow’s left some tin! By Jove! I would—yes, I *would*; needn’t say nothin’ to nobody about it, don’t you see. Yes, if it *is* tin, if I don’t go and marry the child, my name isn’t—*dear Nellie!*’

After all, the Dandy only got up to town late the next afternoon, and then—at half-past five—jumped into a hansom-cab, telling the driver to ‘go as hard as blazes towards the Strand.’

OF A SMALL BOY WHO CAME FROM OLD TUSHER'S.



YOUNG WELCH.

IT is to be supposed that everybody, or very nearly, knows old Tusher. Of course all boys know him; but for the benefit of a few grown-up people (a dreadfully ignorant class, with a deal of pretence about them), it may be as well to mention that old Tusher kept a jolly big school down in Yorkshire, and made a jolly good thing of it, thank you for nothing.

Now, probably, when you hear that old Tusher's school was in Yorkshire, you will run your head against the idea that it was something like Squeers's, that you may have read of in a book called *Nicholas Nickleby*; but it just wasn't. Old Tusher went in for quite another line of business. They starved

the boys at Squeers's, but they feasted them at Tusher's. At Squeers's they spoilt their appetites with brimstone-and-treacle; they gave you tonics at Tusher's. You had just as many helps at dinner as ever you could get through, and you rather caught it warm if you didn't clear your plate up pretty clean.

Why, bless you, at Squeers's they only had meat once a-week, at the outside; but at Tusher's you had a choice of joints every day all the year round, besides all sorts of pies, and puddings, and tarts, and blanc-manges, till you got regularly right-down tired of the lot of them.

Add to this, the lesson part of the business was nothing better than a game of larks; and all the masters were such awful fools, you could crib what you had got to do from a book right under their very noses. Perhaps you would hardly believe there was such a jolly place to call a school; but you may take it for granted, whether you believe it or not, that this statement is not only probable but likely, and, what is more to the purpose, it happens also to be a fact.

And why do you suppose old Tusher carried on a school in this extraordinarily liberal style? Why, because he found it answer. He only took rich boys—that is to say, boys with rich parents; and when a boy came, he never wanted to go away again. Why, talk of holidays, Tusher's boys used to cry when the holiday-time came, and

returned to school quite thin and wasted when it was over. So you see (don't you?) the boys all pleased their friends by liking school so much; and though they did not exactly make all the progress they might have done, taking the cost into consideration, yet it was to a certain extent very gratifying to see that they were so willing to go on learning.

Well, you see, there was a boy at old Tusher's called Welch, who was Tusher's favourite pupil, and the richest boy of the whole lot; at least so it was thought, until certain circumstances transpired, of which the following is a true relation.

One wild and windy night, a man in a cloak came down to Yorkshire by a mail-train that ran off the rails, and was smashed - up about a quarter of a mile from old Tusher's house. Old Tusher and some of the boys heard the noise from the garden, and went down with lanterns to see what assistance they could render the travellers. They found the gentleman in the cloak a good deal shaken, and a little boy eight years old whom he had with him more shaken still.

The name of the man in the cloak was Welch; he was a captain, and had just come home from India: the little boy was his son, and he was the rich pupil before mentioned.

You probably never came across so agreeable a man, and such a fine gentleman, as Captain Welch, nor one with such long moustaches. Old Tusher asked the Captain to stop all night; which he did, and praised the bedroom, and the supper, and everything Tusher showed him, and vowed he would like to have been a boy again himself, and come to school there, although at home in India he had ever so many elephants in his stables, just as her Majesty Queen Victoria has

horses in hers; and the greater part of the Captain's elephants were white ones.

Well, the end of it was, that the Captain went away and left his little boy behind him; and next day Tusher told all the other boys that the new pupil was a millionaire, and that we had better mind what we said before him about our families, as young Welch had been brought up with very elevated notions—which the comic boy of the school said was probably because he had been brought up on an elephant.

But, bless you, young Welch wasn't a bit proud. He fell to on old Tusher's victuals just as if he had never had anything half as good to eat before in his life. He didn't say much, because he didn't know more than twenty words of English; and so the other boys couldn't get such accurate accounts of the elephants' stables as they would have desired; but by his pantomime he seemed to indicate that elephants generally, if not Captain Welch's particular elephants, were uncommonly large animals.

Meanwhile old Tusher went on singing his praises, and his father's praises, and the praises of Welch's home in Calcutta; and all the other boys, when they wrote to their parents, filled at least two sides of their letters with Captain Welch's elephants, and could hardly get them in even then.

But that wasn't all. Old Tusher had a daughter, who was already double young Welch's age, but it was currently reported that she was to be saved up for young Welch, and in another dozen years or so bestow her hand upon him in marriage.

And years rolled on, and young Welch still continued to be the richest boy in the school, and had ever so much more pocket-money than any other, and was also taught

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all the extras, which were, musical instruments, out-of-door sketching, and gymnastics; the sketching being about the biggest lark you ever heard of, as a fellow had only to pretend to lose his pencil, and he could go nutting, or lie on his back and not have to do any work at all, if he didn't want to, which of course he didn't.

By this time, more years having rolled on, young Welch got to be eleven and a half years of age, and then a very surprising circumstance occurred respecting him. Everybody had always thought it rather funny, you must know, that young Welch's father never wrote to him; and though old Tusher said he received letters regularly from India, they never contained any enclosure for the son. Now, one day two or three of the boys were in the pleasure-grounds, near the outer gate, when the postman came, and, contrary to rules, took in the letters, or letter rather, for there was only one, and this one was for young Welch.

Says the postman who brought the letter, 'This here is over weight, and there's tenpence to pay.'

'How's that?' says young Welch; 'it's not a very big one.'

'It's heavy though,' says the postman; 'there's money inside.'

'Here's a shilling for you, my man,' says young Welch. He always had a free-and-easy way with him, as the son of the owner of a stable full of white elephants ought to have. 'And you can keep the twopence yourself for a glass of beer.'

Well, when the postman had gone away, young Welch puts on an air of letters being quite an everyday sort of thing to him, and opens it very carelessly, so that the money inside slipped through his fingers and fell on the ground.

'Hullo!' says some one; 'I'm blessed if young Welch hasn't paid tenpence for a shilling!'

At this, as everybody laughed out, young Welch blushed up a little, and said,

'Who the deuce could have sent it me?' and then began to read.

The other fellows watched his countenance as he did so, and saw that at first he was much surprised, and then very angry, and then very crestfallen; and when he had finished, he turned away and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

He did not say anything, however, but went straight up to the house to ask for old Tusher; and he and old Tusher had a long talk of it shut up by themselves, and no one allowed to interfere. Later on in the evening, in the twilight time, the boys, looking through one of the schoolroom windows, saw old Tusher and young Welch walking up and down on the grass-plot, and more than once old Tusher stopped to pat young Welch upon the head or on the back, as it seemed, to comfort him.

At supper he sat next to old Tusher, and had all the primest tit-bits; but he did not eat very much, and looked uncommonly pale and pitiful; and the fellow who slept in the next bed woke up and heard him crying during the night. But in the morning he said nothing of what had happened; although, as may be supposed, every one was dying to know all about it.

As he kept on saying nothing, however, and kept on keeping on, all the other fellows got rather impatient; and one fellow up and asked him at last, right out, if there was anything wrong with the elephants. You never saw any one blush up as young Welch did then; and to the amazement of all the assembly he replied:

'There are none.'

As soon as the readiest fellow had found breath enough to speak, he asked,

'Since when?'

'Since always,' replied young Welch.

'Then,' continued the readiest boy, 'have there never been none?'

'No,' was young Welch's memorable reply, and he burst out crying. But here old Tusher happened to come to the rescue, and the conversation ceased.

That very night, a fellow who owed young Welch a grudge—but it was a nasty mean thing to do—found out where he had hid the letter he had received, and read it, and reported the contents to all the school.

It was a remarkable letter. There were texts in parts of it, and in other parts bad language, where the writer said he had been ruined by a deuced villain. It began 'My dear Son,' and ended 'Your affectionate and miserable father, Arthur Welch.' It said in one place, 'I hope old Tusher treats you well. He is a shabby old cuss, and has not acted as he ought to have done by me, as an officer and a gentleman, knowing that it was no fault of mine. My acceptances were not duly honoured; but he has given me his promise you sha'n't want. My dear boy, pick up all the learning you can, for it may be useful to you; and try and stand well with those among your schoolfellows who are of good family and well connected. Pray also avoid intemperance and billiards'—young Welch was eleven and a half, you know—'which, with the machinations of deuced scoundrels, have been your poor father's ruin.'

There was a P.S. about the shilling, which was quite pathetic. 'I enclose a trifle for you, my poor boy. It will deprive your father of a day's food; but no matter. I shall be comforted with the thought that it will make my son's heart glad.' Then there followed a text.

When the boys had heard all this, and talked it well over, they

came to one conclusion, and that was, that Captain Welch, who did not live in India (he dated from America), and had never kept any elephants, not even of the ordinary colour, was no better than an old humbug. But then came the puzzling part—who found young Welch's pocket-money, and paid for his board, lodging, lessons, and extras?

This occupied everybody for a long while; and even when it had been thought well over, no solution could be found, until the fellow that read the first letter read a part of one young Welch wrote in answer (it was a disgusting trick that, and he had his head punched for it in due course, as you will see).

The part of the answer he read ran thus:

'DEAR FATHER,—I was very hapy to hear from you and hope you are quite well as it leeves me at present I am very sorry you are so poore and wish you had not sent me the Shilling and I am afraid I have been very wicked to waist so much mony myself but I did not know mr Tusher and miss tusher are very good and kind to me and Treat me better than the parlour boreders but they Never said you had not enough to eat or had no elephants but my dear father I am not hapy any longer since I heard of It and I cant help thinking how hungary you must be and please may I come to you in the hollydays. and I am sure mr Tusher would let me bring a Amper. but I would rather not stop hear any longer if you please dear father because I have been thinking if I do I am only a Beggar and Living on charity like at an arms House or that sort of Thing.'

Now when the news got about that young Welch was, as he put it, only a charity-boy, and not the

richest fellow that ever was, as that jolly old humbug Tusher wanted to have everybody believe, there was naturally a good deal of indignation upon the subject; because all the other boys' fathers were respectable, and paid a pot of money for all their sons got in the extra way; and it was hardly fair to thrust a fellow, who was nothing but a charity-boy, before everybody else, and a pack of elephants that never existed at all down everybody's throat. And so some of the boys did not wait long before they let young Welch know they did not think him quite all the everlasting swell he had thought himself; and he got cut a good deal and sent to Coventry, and struck out of the cricket-club.

Besides this, the boys who used to ask him to go and see them during the holidays wrote home about it; and the parents wrote to old Tusher, and said they understood that old Tusher was harbouring the son of a *disreputable person*, and if he continued to do so, their sons would be taken away.

After this some of the sons were taken away, because old Tusher stuck out, and all the other fellows cut young Welch dead; and young Welch was jolly miserable—one of the jolly miserablest young beggars in fact that ever was born.

Well, when things had gone on in this jolly unpleasant fashion for six months or so, there came another letter about young Welch.

You will think that this story is all about letters; but this one was not from the Captain, but from a lawyer or solicitor (it does not signify which in this instance), who wrote to the following effect, only with lots of legal technicalities which don't particularly matter, and old Tusher read the letter out loud to the assembled school:

'DEAR SIR,' it said (meaning

young Welch, aged eleven and three-quarters)—'I have to inform you, that, in pursuance of a codicil in the will of the late Mr. White, of River-side, Low Tide-street, West Strand, who died on the 25th December last, you are requested to attend at the residence of the deceased, on the 31st of January next, at six o'clock in the evening precisely, to receive your share of twenty thousand pounds eighteen shillings and threepence, being the estimated amount of the said Mr. White's property, as left by him at the date of his death, after deducting necessary legal expenses, house-rent, housekeeper's wages, et cetera.'

'And I have read this letter in public,' said old Tusher, 'so that it may be well known in the school that Master Welch will very shortly inherit his share of the vast property left to him by his deceased relative.'

A great astonishment set in among the other boys after this; but one fellow, who always had his wits about him, jumped up and sang out, 'Three cheers for young Welch!' and when they were given, another boy sang out also, 'Please, sir, may we have a half-holiday?' which old Tusher gave them right off, as was his custom upon all anniversaries, boys' birthdays, and suchlike; so that an artful boy once had two birthdays in the same half, and pretended he had forgotten, when old Tusher found him out.

All that afternoon every boy was speculating as to how much young Welch's share was likely to come to, and supposing there were more than three shares, how they would manage about the odd threepence—toss-up or what; but it was generally agreed that even without the threepence young Welch would make a very fine thing of it, unless,

as that fellow who read Welch's letters on the sly suggested, there should be a couple of hundreds or so of other people to share the money; but this was manifestly such rubbish, and said so spitefully, he got his head punched right off on the spot.

After this there was a kind of general jubilee. Seed-cake and plum-jam for tea; no lessons to learn at night, but hot elderberry wine, and toasts and sentiments, and 'The Three jolly Post-boys' by the comic boy, with a regular right down roaring chorus.

Next day everybody wrote home about the fortune young Welch was coming into, and some of them made it out even bigger than it was by putting down a nought too many; but, as the comic boy (he was an awful fool, yet you couldn't help laughing) said, it was only two noughts short of two millions, and, after all, a nought is nothing.

From that time forward young Welch went back to his place as the richest boy of the school, and everybody began debating as to what he was likely to do when he came into his property, and whether there was any chance of his marrying Miss Tusher when he had grown up enough, and going into partnership with old T.

From that time forward there was no other topic of conversation which could at all compare with this one, except perhaps it was the approaching holidays, to which everybody was looking forward with some misgivings, as generally in the holiday-time a fellow got bustled up a goodish bit about how he had been getting on with his learning, and all that stuff, last half.

During the Christmas holidays you may be sure the subject was discussed by the various boys' families; and when the jolly day came to go back to school again,

all the boys returned in a state of great excitement just in time to see young Welch off to London.

There was a grand supper and speeches overnight, and a half-holiday in the morning to see him to the station—for he was obliged to go by himself, owing to old Tusher being taken suddenly with the gout; and every boy hoorayed him with all the power of his lungs upon the platform, at which the other travellers were probably a good deal surprised.

And perhaps it was this incident which led to the extraordinary amount of attention being paid to young Welch upon his journey up to town. In the first place, however, it must be understood Mrs. Tusher had given half-a-crown to the guard, and told him to be particularly careful with young Welch, as he was coming into a large property, and was then on his way to London to step into it.

This information the guard in question conveyed to another guard, who came and had a look at young Welch from various points of view through the carriage-window.

At every station where they stopped, the first guard kept his eye on young Welch, as though he thought he would get out of coming into his property if he only got a chance and run away; and when they reached the journey's end, he kept his eye on him still and his hand on his collar, for it had been arranged between him and Mrs. Tusher that young Welch should not be lost sight of, but delivered safely at Mr. White's house that evening, so that he might be taken care of until six o'clock the next evening.

But while he had been keeping one eye on young Welch, he had yet had time to wet the other, metaphorically speaking; and by the time they reached London the guard had just drunk such an amount of one thing and another, that he felt

it to be absolutely imperative he should quench his thirst with a little of something else.

Still keeping one eye on young Welch, he took that young gentleman into the first public-house he came to, and called for warm whisky.

Whilst drinking it, he got talking to another man, who was having some warm gin, and he told the warm-gin man how young Welch had come up to come into 'a little matter of twenty million;' and the warm-gin man said he didn't believe it; and the guard swore it was true; and the warm-gin man said it was a lie, with emphasis; and then they stepped outside and pulled off their coats.

Now, while they were fighting, young Welch was very much frightened, for a mob of roughs had collected and pushed him to and fro; and he ran away down the street and round the corner. But when he would have retraced his steps, he found he had lost his way.

He wandered about for quite two hours looking for the public-house; but though he found several other public-houses that were as like it as two peas, he could not find the right one; and the more he searched, the farther he got away from it.

At last he stopped short in a quiet little back street, and pulled out his watch to see the time. While he was looking at it, however, a hand with long fingers came round from the back of him and closed upon it, and another hand grasped his throat, and squeezed it so tightly he was half suffocated. Next moment he came down with a great crack on the back of his head, and lay for some moments stunned.

An old gentleman in rather ragged clothes and flavoured by various unpleasant odours, such as tobacco and onions and stale liquor,

came to raise him; and as he was for a few minutes unable to answer any questions, felt for his, young Welch's, card in the waistcoat-pocket, where young Welch generally carried his portmonnaie. But as it was not there, either the person who had taken the watch, or some one else, must have taken that also.

The ragged old gentleman, however, had a particular appointment to keep, and could not stay any longer to help young Welch to find the thief; and so, as he did not know what to do himself, he only cried and walked away.

But he was desperately tired by this time, and very hungry; and he thought the best thing he could do would be to find out Mr. White's house; and he began to make inquiries.

It was now nearly midnight, and he was right at the other end of London; but by dint of perseverance, he came at length to Low-tide-street, found the house, and pulled loudly at the bell.

There was no notice taken of him for a long while; and then a female head with a frilled nightcap on it was protruded from one of the upper windows, and a voice asked,

'Who's there?'

'O, if you please,' said young Welch, 'it's me.'

'Who are you?' inquired the frilled nightcap.

'O, if you please, I'm come for the money.'

'What money?'

'The money that was left me.'

'There's no money left that I know of. Where do you come from?'

'O, if you please, I'm from Mr. Tusher's.'

'From whose's?'

'From Tusher's.'

'What TUSHER is that?'

'There's only one Mr. Tusher

that I know of, ma'am,' replied young Welch, 'and he's in Yorkshire.'

'Has he sent you from there this evening, then?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Then,' said the lady above, 'you'd better Tusher yourself off back again from where you come from, or I shall Tusher a jug of cold water atop of you pretty sharply!'

Then the frilled nightcap disappeared, and the window was slammed down, and young Welch was left disconsolate, and it began to rain.

He wandered about throughout the night, and walked very many weary miles, and was not a little scared by the sights he saw. He came in his rambles upon poor shivering creatures huddled upon the seats in the Park, and others

crowded together under archways and down dark passages. He sat down himself once, and tried to go to sleep, but it was so bitterly cold, he could not.

The look of some of the other night wanderers half frightened him out of his wits; and once or twice a policeman, noticing that he wore good clothes, turned round and eyed him suspiciously, on which occasions he ran away again faster than ever.

But at length, about five o'clock in the morning, he found his way back to the railway station, and there met the very guard who had had charge of him, and who was mightily pleased to see him again. And so, later on in the day, he reached his journey's end without further mishap.



OF THE FOURTEENTH PERSON, WHO
WAS NO BETTER THAN HE NEED
HAVE BEEN.



DICK WHITE.

RICHARD WHITE, junior, esquire, commonly known as Dick White, soon after leaving his father in dudgeon, made a discovery.

It was not a discovery likely to prove of advantage to him; on the contrary, it threatened to be very inconvenient, and to give him a considerable amount of trouble. It was the discovery of a possession. Certainly he had before this had some inkling of the fact, from occasional headaches, with now and then a furred tongue; but it was only on the next day after quarrel-

ling with his father, that Dick White, for the first time in his life, thoroughly realised the fact that he had a stomach.

Now Dick White did not care a fig for anatomy or any other science, unless it was the branch of mathematics relating to the measurement of angles. It may sound strange, but it is none the less true, that Dick White had made quite a study of acute, right, and obtuse angles; he could discourse learnedly upon the angle of incidence and the angle of reflection; but the anomaly is easily explained, since Dick White was a member of that board of green cloth known in common parlance as a billiard-table, and Dick's angular studies were made with a lancewood cue for a pen; his lines were drawn with a round ivory ball; and his angles were made by the aid of the table's patent india-rubber cushions.

But *apropos* of Richard White's stomach. Heretofore, in consequence of much smoking and potations large, hunger was a pain that had never troubled him; but now he awoke to the consciousness that without money one cannot eat—and that eat he must to live.

In fact, just then, from having gone to bed perfectly sober, Richard White had awakened with a fine appetite, whose edge he could not even take off with the Indian weed, for pouch and cigar-case were perfectly empty. After leaving his offended parent he had visited a

billiard-table in the Strand, where he had with great difficulty picked up enough to pay for his bed ; but, on engaging with a stranger, a tall aristocratic-looking gentleman with a great deal of jewelry about his person, Dick discovered that he had met his match, and after some hours' hard fighting he was merely the winner of a few shillings, which the aristocratic stranger frankly owned himself unable to pay ; affording Dick the satisfaction of knowing that the new friend who fraternised with him so warmly was as penniless as himself.

'Well,' said Dick in a dignified way, 'sooner than not pay my debts of honour, I think I should solicit the aid of "my uncle;"' and he pointed to the stranger's elaborate locket and chain.

'Exactly,' said the other, winking with great freedom, for he had taken stock of his adversary ; 'but you see, my dear fellow, he would not take them in. In fact, if he did, it would be a reverse of circumstances, and I should be taking him in ; eh, d'ye see ?'

Dick White did see, and muttering something about its never raining without it poured, he departed and obtained a bed at a neighbouring hotel, had as much of it as he possibly could for his money, and went away in the morning, to the great disgust of waiter, boots, and chambermaid, who did not fail to express their opinions respecting 'seedy swells who didn't oughter be allowed to have beds in respectable hotels.'

We seem to keep running away from our subject, and that is precisely what Dick White essayed to do, but in vain—his forgetfulness was always swept away by a sharp pang of hunger ; and again angrily he asked himself what he should do.

Certainly there was an unsatisfactory kind of food whereof he

might have eaten and been filled ; but, hungry as he was, Dick would not stoop to eat humble pie ; and seeking a place for cogitation, and the solving of the great problem—what should he do?—Dick White turned out of the Strand, and walked to the turn-stile at Waterloo-bridge, thrusting his hand in his pocket as he did so.

'No change—pay as I come back,' he said fiercely as he withdrew that hand, when the man glanced at him for a moment, and then nodded, while Dick passed through with a click, click, click. It was broad daylight, and he was well-dressed, though his coat was a little soiled with cigar-ash ; so that he did not look a candidate for twelve intelligent jurymen and a coroner's summing-up. Such was the conclusion of the toll-man ; but all the same, Dick White turned into a recess and sat down.

What should he do? He was penniless, and in debt ; but, strange to say, the only debt that troubled him was the one he had just incurred for the sum of one half-penny ; and possibly he would not have cared for that, only that its non-payment would give him,—as his own sense might have told him it must,—the trouble of crossing over to the Surrey side, and getting back into fashionable regions *viâ* Westminster- or Blackfriars-bridge.

He argued, in the course of his meditation on the means of sustaining life, that man was made either to prey upon others or to be preyed upon, and therefore divisible into two classes. People could not prey upon him, save in a cannibal way ; so he must perforce belong to the preyers ; and he quietly resolved to accept his position, and to begin to prey. But how ?

He could not lend money without capital, neither could he start in trade. Photography required

apparatus as well as knowledge, and of late people had grown less anxious touching their *cartes*. Could he start a company—drive a cab—sweep a crossing opposite his father's door—hold horses, after investing in a red-sleeved waistcoat in Holywell-street? No, he could not take to any of these; at least, not yet—but, confound it, how cold those stones were!

Dick White got up and walked across the bridge out into the Waterloo-road, cold and spiritless; for, in spite of what is said respecting the genial Christmas time, there is no more dreary day in the year than that devoted to boxing. Neither is the Waterloo-road a cheerful place at the best of times, and years back it wore the aspect of being a large gallery for the exhibition of unsuccessful trades and traders. It was no wonder that Dick shivered as he hurried past a decayed mechanic selling matches in company with his family, and who addressed the schemer as 'keyind Chrischun fren'—treading on one of the children's toes the next instant for looking after two boys running behind a cab; and only just in time, for the young mendicant had his lips parted to shout, 'Whip behind!'

If he had lived a hundred years earlier, he might have invested in a black mask and a brace of pistols, taken to one of the outskirts as a footpad, and then won his way up to the honourable fame of a knight of the road, with a gallant horse of the Black-Bess breed, and died nobly, after a glorious career, at Tyburn; while his biography would have been read, 'richly illustrated,' in penny weekly numbers, Nos. 2 and 3 presented gratis to purchasers of No. 1.

But then Dick White did not live a hundred years ago; for he was living at the time when the thought occurred to him; and once

more he asked himself the still-pending question, what should he do? He responded to the query that time out aloud, and in a fierce way; and this is how he answered it—'Live by my wits.'

When they failed him, and he became bankrupt in his stock of assurance, he meant to attack the humble pie waiting for him at home, but not before. So, making the best of his way back to the Middlesex shore, he divested himself of his gold watch and chain, walked up and down a few streets till the familiar sign of the three golden pills of the Medici met his eye—the golden pills of those physicians whose medicaments are invaluable for the ills of the pocket; and, without giving way to the false shame which attacks so many, he rushed in, laid down watch and chain upon the counter, and demanded fifteen pounds thereon.

And obtained the loan? No; but he received twelve pounds less the price of the ticket; and ten minutes after he was feasting royally on coffee and mutton-chops—that is, royally as to appetite.

Two days after, an advertisement appeared in the *Times*, advising all who required a *good* servant to apply at the Registration Company's Office, West Audley-street, where servants of every description could be hired from ten to four.

Those who paid the office a visit, seeking situation or servant, found Dick White, in blue spectacles, seated behind a large account-book at a baize-covered table, taking fees and entering names. The walls were covered with neatly-written notices relative to cooks, housemaids, ladies'-maids, and footmen not under six feet in height; and for a whole month the institution seemed to be flourishing, and the 'company' likely to pay a dividend. But at the end of that time, when the police wished to make inquiries

respecting the antecedents of a young lady who had been recommended to fill the situation of nursery-governess in a nobleman's family, the constable found the office closed, and the landlord ignorant as to the whereabouts of the company's secretary. In fact, the returns over and above the expenditure were so small, that Dick White had dissolved the company, and resolved upon trying something more congenial.

He sought that something for the next few weeks in one of his favourite pursuits, to wit, billiards; but in that profession he soon found that there were too many needy adventurers; and, still low in pocket, he gave that up, and turned his attention in other directions, with constantly-varying success.

Dick owned to himself at this time that, had it not been for the newspapers, he must have starved; but, once a happy thought occurred to him—presto! three or four shillings spent in an advertisement, and it was being read throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Somehow or another, he was always getting down to his last crown; and then, if within reach, that particular recess on Waterloo-bridge was sought, in the hope that inspiration would come.

He was seated there one hot day, smoking a cheap very rank cigar, and trying in vain to think of something new. Every idea for getting a living seemed to have been worked up—every hole to be filled. He was low-spirited, and more than once told himself that he had better jump over and end all his troubles; but, like Hamlet, he had his doubts as to whether that act would end them; and, though heartily sick of being hard-up, he was in nowise tired of life, which, on the whole, he found a very supportable state of thing.

'I'll give it up for to-day,' said Dick at last. 'My Muse is out of town. Bother the flies!'

Smack came down Dick's hand upon an unfortunate insect that, after vainly attempting to effect a lodgment upon his cheek, had taken to one knee, to be incorporated the next instant with the cloth.

Apparently delighted with his successful blow, Dick repeated it upon the other knee, jumped up, ran to his lodging situated in Lyon's-inn, sat scribbling for ten minutes or so, and then hurried away to two or three newspaper-offices; and the next day people all over England who were troubled by the plague of flies that visits us towards the end of summer, read with intense interest the advertisement of Professor Entomos's new patent fly-destroyers, each one guaranteed to destroy one hundred millions of flies—not sticky, offensive, or poisonous. One sent post-free upon the receipt of thirteen postage-stamps.

One day, and no application; two days, ditto; and but for a lucky hit at the billiard-table, Dick would once more have been hungry. That night he was rather low-spirited, and more than once his inner man whispered plainly of the old house in the by-street; but Dick was not yet hungry enough for the humble-pie repast; and he was awakened the next morning by what seemed like a heavy pattering shower in the outer room—patter, patter, patter. Something must be wrong. It was as if rain were falling upon the floor.

Jumping out of bed, and hurrying on his things, he at length peeped out, to find that the shower was over; but beneath the letter-slit in the door lay a whole heap of missives that had come by the general post, one and all enclosing thirteen postage-stamps, and an

application for the destroyer of one hundred millions of flies.

Dick White smiled, the smile of conscious genius, and gathered up his letters. He breakfasted well that morning, after changing his stamps for current coin of the realm, and then prepared, in all due honesty, to satisfy each applicant.

But this was not done without a little labour, and a few instruction-labels had to be printed. Dick worked hard, however, the toil acting as balm to his conscience; and as he worked on, advertised again; while, the applications coming tumbling in, he began to look upon himself as a public benefactor, till such time as the cold winds of an early autumn set in, Nature herself sweeping away the flies, when for nearly a year Othello's occupation was gone; and on casting-up his gains, Dick had the satisfaction of finding that the advertising had taken nearly the whole of his profit.

It may be as well, though, to explain the invention—one which must have given universal satisfaction, for the professor never had a complaint, save from a stationer in a country town, who, evidently moved by a desire to supply the invention wholesale, forwarded cash for a dozen, and two days after receiving his parcel intimated by post that unless the money were refunded per return, he should make application to the police. Under these circumstances, Dick White, having his father's example before his eyes, declared himself to be too busy to attend to legal matters, refunded the cash, and refrained from attending to subsequent wholesale orders, confining himself to the retail and full-price department.

We were present when one applicant received the professor's Destroyer, and on the wrapper (under a quarter of a pound) being opened

it was found to contain a piece of millboard, of the size and shape of a razor strop, with the following instructions pasted thereon:

'Spread a little powdered sugar upon the table of a room infested with flies, wait till they congregate, then grasp the Destroyer tightly by the handle, advance cautiously, and *hit hard*.'

Dick lived for months upon pills—lung-pills prepared from the recipe of a consumptive patient, the aforesaid recipe being made known as an act of gratitude; but those pills were so efficacious that no one ever required more than one box. He then invented a depilatory and a whisker-producer, both prepared from precisely the same materials; but here again the advertising nearly ruined him. But nothing daunted he tried his hand at Christmas novelties, his being the brain that introduced to the public the bitter-aloed comfits, the gunpowdered candles, and a few other pleasing inventions of a similar character.

Still it was hand-to-mouth living, for none of his schemes were attended with the great success he anticipated. He advertised ways for getting a living, but still the stamps received all went to the various papers; and he who longed to benefit others at twelve stamps each could not benefit himself. It was plain that England did not appreciate him, and he determined upon making only one *coup* more, and then leaving his mother country for the hospitable arms of France.

He had had this grand project *in petto* for some time, but before putting it in force he had tried a few minor adaptations from the French: contracting for the orange-peel at various theatres and places of amusement, supplying therewith a manufacturer of candied peel and marmalade—Bonnie-Dundee mar-

malade, celebrated and familiar to many, no doubt, for its gentle *soupe* of sawdust, known to the eaters as a pine or pine-apple flavour.

A tobacco scheme which he originated was less successful; there was more difficulty in obtaining the cigar-ends, and, times being hard, people smoked their cigars exceedingly short; otherwise the speculation must have proved very profitable; for the tobacco cut from the waste ends formed a fine-flavoured weed, particularly mild in the smoking, and was growing very popular under the name of Black Returns.

There was a benevolence and prevention of waste in these latter projects that Dick considered to be highly creditable; but as they did not bring him the profit he was justified in expecting, he turned his attention to his last English speculation, making arrangements for an immediate departure for *la belle* France in case of failure.

For the proper carrying out of his scheme Dick took fresh apartments, finding them in the pleasant retirement of Brownlow-street, Holborn, and thence he sent simultaneously advertisements to forty provincial papers, worded to the effect that a step-father offered 100*l.* to any respectable couple, entirely without family, who would adopt a little girl aged ten months. Applicants to be of the Wesleyan persuasion, and ready to produce unimpeachable references as to position in life and character, and to show that they would be prepared to act kindly and conscientiously by the child, also they were not moved by a desire merely to possess the offered premium. Applications to be addressed to Brownlow-street with references, when, if satisfactory, arrangements would be immediately made for an interview and the transfer of the child. But as the advertiser had been much troubled by irresponsible and fic-

titious personages, to prove their good faith, applicants were requested to enclose five shillings in postage-stamps, which would be returned in case of the negotiation being broken off.

For the most part the advertisements appeared on a Saturday; five, however, were in a Friday edition, and four more were refused a place in the old-established papers to which they were sent, the proprietors returning the stamps. The Saturday passed uneventfully, as did of course Sunday; but with the delivery of the general-post letters on Monday, Dick's scheme began to show fruit, the letters pouring in, almost without exception containing the stipulated five shillings in stamps. The amount of purity, religious sentiment, and benevolence in the provinces, as shown by these letters, was something startling. There was not one applicant who cared a rush for the 100*l.*, so long as the child, the sweet innocent denied to them after many years of matrimony, could be obtained. The general desire seemed to be to take the infant, the money was quite a secondary consideration; but still several of the writers were willing to take the 100*l.* and invest it for the little one's benefit on coming of age. Scripture was quoted, and women compared themselves to Hannah or Sarah, while tears or drops of some kind had blotted more than one letter. Sincere or not, the love, charity, benevolence, what you will, displayed, were something marvellous; but unfortunately there was no child, and Dick White sat grimly smiling as he opened letter after letter and spread out the stamps till a large note-case he had was crammed, and its elastic band hard pressed to perform its duty.

Then came the task of burning the missives, till the fire was filled with spark-dancing tinder; when

Dick lit a cigar, and sat and smoked—awaiting another post probably before commencing his replies.

Another post, and another, and another brought him fresh applications from endless out-of-the-way country places on the Tuesday and Wednesday; and on the Friday evening Dick was sitting considering whether he should try the scheme in another part of the country, when his cigar dropped from his fingers, and his heavy pale face turned to an ashy hue; for there was a strange knock at the door below, and a woman's voice in parley with the visitor.

Now to any one living in lodgings, there is nothing so very startling in a quiet knock, or the sound of a man's voice speaking to whoever opens; but, all the same, there was trouble depicted on Richard White's countenance; the great beads stood upon his brow; and creeping across the floor he locked his door, darted through into the bedroom and did the same there; and then coming back, he buckled the strap of a small leather bag over his shoulders, took two square packets from a table and buttoned them securely up in his coat, put on his overcoat and hat, and then stood listening in the dark, just as steps were ascending the stairs and some one knocked at his door.

He stood, not daring to breathe aloud while the knock was repeated twice.

'Perhaps he 'ave gone out, sir,' said the landlady from below. 'Will you leave any message?'

'Thank you, I'll wait,' said a voice; and a strange feeling of nervous trembling came upon Dick White. He had no business with anyone in London that should bring a visitor to these apartments, for they were not known to a soul: the business, then, must be respecting the advertisements; and what was the visitor's purpose?

Dick White knew, and he strode silently to the window lit up by the gas-lamp down in the street. There were not many people visible; but there was a policeman; and Dick could hardly suppress a groan as he saw that there was no escape there.

He turned from the window, and was softly stealing back, when he became aware of a faint tearing noise, as of a mouse busy with its teeth upon the grain of wood, and for a few moments he stood wondering; but the next instant he understood the meaning of the noise, and carefully drawing the cover from the table, he hung it upon a peg behind the door, letting its folds fall softly over a moving spot of bright steel which twinkled and shone just where a ray of light fell from the street-lamp.

That act saved him from being seen; for whoever was outside had been cautiously boring a hole through the door with a gimlet, so as to make a spot for observation; but so far the plan was frustrated.

Dick heard the sound of the withdrawn gimlet, and then an impatient ejaculation, followed by a sharp summons.

'Is any one at home here?' said the same voice.

No answer.

'Now, sir, have the goodness to open this door. It's of no use: the game's up, and I know you are there.'

No answer, only Dick's heart palpitating fiercely. What a fool he was, he thought, not to have gone away an hour sooner, content with what he had done, instead of waiting to be taken; for he knew that this last scheme was one which brought him within the pale of the law.

But it was too late to repent now, and all his scheming energy was directed to a way for making his escape.

'Am I to break this door down?' said the same voice. 'I know you're there: your key's inside. If the door is not opened in five minutes, I shall have it forced.'

'That you just won't do nothing of the kind, so I tell you,' said the voice of the landlady.

'In the Queen's name, ma'am,' replied the first speaker.

'The Queen don't pay my rates and taxes, and rent, and outgoings for repairs,' said the landlady, in crescendo; 'and if you want my lodger, young man, you'll have to wait till he opens his door.'

'Step up here, will you?' exclaimed the same voice; and Dick heard a heavy foot upon the stairs.

What was he to do? Was he to be taken here like a rat in a cage? What an ass! what an idiot! with all his scheming not to have had the sense of a beast of the field, and provided a means of escape—a second outlet to his lair. The back window looked out upon a small enclosed yard, which would be only a second trap, if he threw open the sash and dropped into it, perhaps to break a limb in so doing.

There was expostulation for a few minutes outside, then the firm voice of the law, and lastly, as if to quicken his steps, the door was fiercely shaken.

Could he hide himself? There was the chimney; but he turned from that with a bitter smile, knowing that it would only afford him a hole from which he would be ignominiously dragged.

Crash! They were in earnest, and the frail old door would not stand many more such shocks. What could he do? Could he not scheme anything, after all?

He stepped on tip-toe to the window, and peered out. There were only the ordinary passengers, and so far they evidently had not learned that there was a police-raid. There was not even the constable

in the street now; and, quick as thought, just as another crash came at the door, one which nearly burst off the lock, Dick White softly raised the sash of the front-window and stepped out on to the great moulding over the shop below; but as he did so, he gave the alarm by dislodging a couple of flower-pots, sending them with a loud crash upon the pavement.

There was not a moment to lose. He was dressed ready for starting; he had his treasure in stamps safely secured. There was a street-lamp only a few feet from him, and with a bold leap he cleared the distance, catching and hanging to the iron ladder-bar for an instant, to swing violently to and fro, and then he dropped to the ground and ran north, just as there was the rush of feet, and the old and familiar cry of 'Stop thief!'

But Dick White was determined not to be taken easily. He ran to the end of the street, turned to the right, and doubled down Warwick-court, crossed Holborn unstayed, ran down Chancery-lane, an ever-increasing tail of pursuers panting and thronging behind him, the inherent love of hunting growing stronger each moment in the British mind. One man who, hearing the cry of 'Stop thief!' tried to stop him, Dick caught right in the chest, and rolled him over on to the pavement, where he lay just in time to trip up the foremost policeman, another pursuer falling as well.

On went Dick, panting but warming to the work. At that time of night Chancery-lane was a dreary empty way, and there was a free course for the fugitive, who dodged the next opposer of his liberty; but the sound of the pursuit rang echoing down the lane, unchecked by the distant roars of Fleet-street and Holborn, the latter each moment growing more distant as the other seemed to increase.

More and more empty the lane seemed to grow as he raced on, and no one took up the chase; but for all that Dick knew that it was only a question of time. The appearance of a fresh policeman on the scene would be almost fatal, and the crowded street below would certainly insure his capture.

Still he was not taken yet, and a good dozen yards were between him and his next pursuer. He made then as if to go straight down the lane, but doubled into Carey-street, then rushed fiercely down Bell-yard, to the upsetting of a couple of law-clerks bent on oysters, but who, in revenge, took up the chase, as the runner, still followed by the ringing cries, dodged amongst the traffic, through Temple-bar, along the Strand, towards St. Clement's churchyard, down Devereux-court out into Essex-street, and, still followed, ran on at full speed.

Had thoughts of the old house come upon him, and did he mean to double again, and make in his dire extremity for his father's door? No. Dick White's blood was up now; he was growing desperate, and could he have seized a couple of these yelling insensate hounds, who strove, ignorant of his offence, to run him down, he would have tried to strangle them without compunction.

His breath came thick and fast, and he knew that he could go little farther: there was a burning sensation in his chest, and the taste as of blood in his mouth; but he would run till he dropped; though could he reach the bottom of the street, there were the steps, and if the tide were down, he might hide amongst the barges, or escape somewhere through the mud.

'Stop thief! stop thief!' echoing down the street, and an organ playing an air from an opera stopped as if by magic. A man darted from

a doorway to arrest the hunted one; but he had better have refrained, for a fierce blow sent him into the road, where his head struck with sickening violence upon the granite paving, and by the time he was sitting up, giddy and confused, Dick was at the steps. Running down, he reached the gangway of the steamboat-pier, but only to groan as he saw to his dismay that the tide was up.

There was no retreat, for his pursuers were close upon him. What was it to be—a prison and disgrace, or the river?

Dick White was no coward, and without a moment's hesitation he ran along, down the floating pier, giving a glance out to where the lights flashed on the dark-flowing stream, with the tide running down fast. Then there was a loud shout of horror from behind, a bold leap, a splash, and Dick was swimming strongly out towards the middle of the river.

It was bold, but it was the only way to safety; and he smiled bitterly, with the muddy water bubbling at his lip, as he heard his pursuers' shouts for the Thames police-galley, and knew that he must be already out of their sight; then he thought of Waterloo-bridge and the recess, then of his plunder in postage-stamps, and of the water spoiling them; then of his life—for he felt that he could not keep afloat long, exhausted as he was.

The next moment he saw below him the mooring lights of a couple of river-steamers anchored for the night, and striking out to reach them, he was swept on by the tide, sinking lower and lower each instant, till, feeling that his last effort had been made, he opened his mouth to cry for help, sank beneath the surface, rose again, and then with despairing, clutching hand, he grasped at and his fingers closed upon the looped chain fes-



Page 96.

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stooned along the bows of the river-boats, and hung there for a good quarter-of-an-hour, till somewhat recovered he tried to draw himself up and climb on board, a feat which he did not accomplish till almost worn out, when he fell down on the deck and lay motionless.

Half-an-hour later, shivering with the cold, Dick White was cautiously seeking for a way of escape from his new prison, finding it at last in the shape of a small boat, which, drawing up by the painter, he stepped into, and seizing the sculls, was rowing away just as there came a hail from the steamer he had left. But it was too late. Dick had made his escape, and after proceeding a distance down the river, he landed at some dark and gloomy-looking stairs near London Bridge, shook and wrung off as much water as he could, and making his way along the most secluded streets, he had an accomplice in the shape of a soaking shower, which efficiently screened him; then he sought a bed at a public-house, where he had ample excuse for sending his clothes to be dried, the landlady declaring though, that she never saw any one so soaked before.

Dick had the pleasure of reading an account of his death next morning over his breakfast, the report describing him as a notorious swindler, and narrating his drowning with minute exactness. The police were pretty sharp, but they did not know the man they had sought; for with the exercise of a little caution, Dick was able to change his unspoiled stamps; and feeling now that the time had come for bidding farewell to England, he made his way to the London-bridge terminus one morning, and the next saw him in Paris, bent upon scheming honestly for some way of gaining his livelihood; for he owned to himself that his last plan did savour somewhat of swind-

ling, and that he had had a narrow escape of bringing down dishonour upon the pure White escutcheon.

Dick White spoke French like a native, as the saying is; that is to say, he had learned it thoroughly, or had it well drummed into his head at school, forgotten seven-eighths of it, and picked it up again amongst the French billiard-players in the neighbourhood of Leicester-square; so that he had no difficulty in settling down to his new abode, which welcomed him with open arms upon his commencing in a new line; for, whatever may have been attempted previously, Dick White's was the genuine institution.

Upon quietly settling down, he had again racked his brains as to the way in which he should employ his small capital, revolving every human weakness before his mind in turn. Patent medicines were analysed by government; shady trades were too much under police supervision; the French billiard-players were too skilful. What should he do? What pursuit was there in which he could make the national character subservient to his ends?

The idea came, as did that for the fly-papers, with a flash; and before the week was out, the bureau of Monsieur Blanc was, if not in full operation, commencing business after this wise:

The bureau of Monsieur Blanc was elegantly furnished, and callers were ushered in by a most carefully-attired *laquais*.

'Madame wished to see me?' said Dick, rising to place a chair for a stout lady in half-mourning.

Madame had seen the *avis* of Monsieur Blanc in the journal.

Précisément. Would Madame kindly furnish Monsieur Blanc with a few particulars to enter in the little book before him, bound in white satin, with gilt-edged leaves?

H

Madame hesitated.

Madame might be perfectly candid with Monsieur Blanc, whose negotiations were conducted with the strictest secrecy and in perfect *bon foi*. Her feelings should in no way be outraged.

But — remuneration, Madame suggested.

Ah! a secondary consideration entirely. M. Blanc, in the event of a happy matrimonial engagement being effected, might ask a per-centage upon the lady's *dot*, or he might be content with the presents made to him by the happy pair. *Voilà tout*.

Madame was satisfied, and Monsieur Blanc wrote on.

Eight thousand francs per annum in rentes, widow, &c. &c. And her wishes?

Madame wished a perfect gentleman, fortune no object, but a title would be an acquisition. And soon after she was bowed out, trying to blush as, like a soft cloud over the sun, her thick veil was allowed to fall.

Two days had not elapsed before there was a titleless gentleman on the books of M. Blanc, who, on consideration of eight thousand francs of rentes, did not object to a lady slightly vulgar, and possessed of the attributes known in our non-ethereal Saxon tongue as fat, fair, and forty.

Dick did very well with the contract between Monsieur Hyacinthe de la Pierre and the Veuve Brome. The presents he received from the stout dame were substantial as her sweet self. Moreover she confided to him that monsieur *son mari* was *adorable*. Their acquaintance formed an introduction to a certain class of society, and M. Blanc dined out frequently. The De la Pierres, too, were his references in more than one charming matrimonial project; and matters went on flowing so smoothly that Dick White rubbed

his soft hands and told himself that fortune was smiling upon him at last. In fact, his matrimonial agency worked so well, that he made up his mind to become a candidate for, or purchaser of his own goods, scanning carefully the appearance and prospects of each first-class fair applicant for the honours of matrimony; for M. Blanc classified his visitors into first, second, and third class, according to their means; such trifles as age, appearance, temper, or accomplishments being left out of the question. But for some time no suitable lady presented herself. Dick had introduced to each other and seen married couples by the score; but not one lady seemed suited for himself, and he grew somewhat discouraged. But he was hopeful still; matters were working right, he thought, and he had only to wait; when one evening a M. Bernhard was announced.

Would he take a chair?

'Certainly; but, my dear sir,' the visitor exclaimed, 'I have not come on this sort of business.'

'But you were introduced with the card of my friends the De la Pierres.'

'To be sure; they are old friends of mine. I dine there to-night in fact, and madame is *au désespoir*. She sent me to ask your aid.'

'In what way can I serve her?' said Dick White with dignity, as with true insular care he involuntarily buttoned his pockets.

'You know the strange superstition. Our *chère* madame invited fourteen to dinner, and one has sent word he cannot come. Thirteen is unlucky, and madame is in agony unless you will make the fourteenth.'

'Is that all?' said Dick.

'Yes, that is all,' said M. Bernhard.

'I'll be there,' said Dick, to whom a new idea had occurred. 'But may I not place your name upon my books, monsieur?'

'Ah, *ma foi* ! I married an English mees these long years ago. But time presses. Adieu !'

'Bye-bye !' said Dick nonchalantly ; and half-an-hour after he was introduced to a young French lady of thirty-three, whom he led down to dinner in his character of Quatorzième ; and, warned by Madame de la Pierre's whisper respecting her handsome *dot*, the *chef de bureau* lost no time in trying to transact business.

He knew a gentleman that he felt sure mademoiselle would love, could she but read his heart.

Mademoiselle blushed, and allowed herself to be led during the course of the evening to a side drawing-room, where Dick was indefatigable in his attentions ; for the lady, as he owned to himself, might have been worse. True, if he waited, something better might turn up ; but a little thought made him quote to himself a few of the old English aphorisms : ' A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush ;' ' Strike while the iron is hot,' &c. ; and he made up his mind matrimonially, provided Celestine Chalay could be brought to the same way of thinking.

The time was short, but Dick made the most of it ; and there certainly was a slight pressure in return as he held her hand and assisted her to the carriage. Would she visit the bureau ?

She dared not : she had a reason.

And that reason ?

Papa !

Was some one then to be left in despair ?

They say drowning men catch at straws ; and surely sometimes ladies swamped in the great slough of old-maidism are found to snatch at any hand that offers ; at all events it was so here ; for the carriage drove off with the words ringing in Dick White's — otherwise

Monsieur Blanc's — ears, that it was possible that a call might be made upon *cette chère* Madame de la Pierre during the next afternoon.

A fortune equivalent in English money to fourteen hundred a-year, — and the lady ? Well, her manners were not bad, and the weaker vessel was not expected to be strong. Dick White was cruel enough to say that there was a slight flaw or crack in that vessel ; but nevertheless he persevered with his suit, and the meetings at Madame de la Pierre's grew frequent, to the neglect of the bureau, two or three contracts being settled between unsuitable people, Monsieur Blanc having so far forgotten himself as to neglect the proper inquiries ; the effect being that Monsieur A., professing to have so many francs of income, espoused Madame B., of similar pretensions. The same was the case with Messieurs C. and D., who were introduced to Mesdames E. and F. ; and before many days were over, the whole of the contracting parties were assailing Monsieur Blanc, whom they charged with swindling them, since each couple proved to be absolutely penniless. Proper acumen would have avoided such unpleasantnesses ; but Monsieur Blanc's time had been taken up to such an extent with the *dot* of the fair Celestine, that he did not see the deceit practised, and all he could do was to advise his self-deceiving clients to let love fill the place they expected to be occupied by money, and then avoid further unpleasantnesses by closing the bureau — *pro tem.* of course, or till the visits of the disappointed contractors had ceased.

Meanwhile, to avoid rust, Dick White publicly announced his readiness to fill the post of Quatorzième at dinners generally, and by slow degrees began to acquire a connection. The task was pleasant, the dinners and wines generally

good. He had a ready flow of conversational power; and if the fourteenth party, the exorciser of the spirit of ill-luck, had been required more frequently, the profession would have been most satisfactory.

Time flew on, and the visits to Madame de la Pierre's were not without result. The fair Celestine grew more and more willing to listen to her courtier's suit, and at last matters were brought to a climax.

'Papa is so cruel!' sobbed the maiden one day when, by accident, Madame de la Pierre had been called from the room. 'He wishes me to espouse M. le Baron Longueville.'

'But you will not?' whispered Dick earnestly.

'*Que voulez-vous!*' sobbed the lady. 'What can I do?'

Dick White's words grew very low and earnest, and there were references made to flight—England—a few weeks to gain papa's forgiveness; and then, with the rather bony form of the fair Celestine clasped in his arms, the contract was about to be sealed by a salute, when the door was opened, and, as the lady shrieked the word 'Papa!' a yellow little man, furious with passion, dashed into the room. There were a few angry words passed; there was a stick raised, and Monsieur Blanc received a sharp cut across the cheek; the next moment the lady swooned, but not before she had seen the hot blood of the Englishman triumph over his discretion, and papa rolled over upon the carpet by a blow from the shoulder.

It took six months of plotting before Dick White could gain an interview, and once more win over the lady to his wishes. But all was at length settled; and one night a *fiacre* was seen waiting at a door in a retired street. The hour was at hand, and Dick White, muffled and cloaked, sat inside waiting.

At last, then, success was to attend him. The lady, closely disguised, was to descend and enter the *fiacre*; and, with his heiress in her own right, Dick felt that he could set fortune at defiance.

There was the sound of the door opening; her figure was seen descending the steps, and, turning the handle of the *fiacre*, Dick leaned forward, when two sergents de ville stepped up—one to escort the lady back, the other to take his seat by Dick, to give some instructions to the driver; and then the vehicle was driven away.

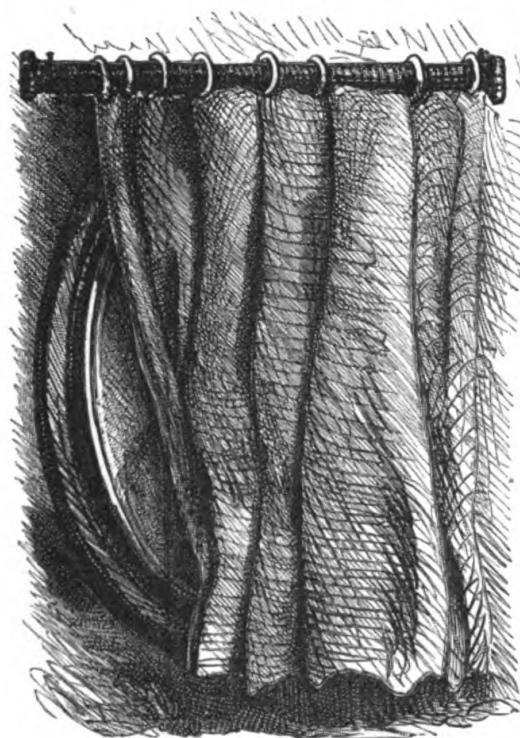
Police surveillance in Paris is painful; therefore it is not surprising that the next month found Richard White, once more as Monsieur Blanc, practising his new profession of Quatorzième; but, after all, it was but a poor trade, and a great many days did Mr. White go dinnerless.

Thus at length he was obliged to try something else; and that failing, and yet another spec failing after that, he once more turned his face towards the land of his birth.

'I wonder what will happen next?' said Dick, as he set foot in London.

He little thought what a surprising event was about to occur.

OF EVERYBODY'S VERY GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT, WITH SOME PARTICULARS OF A DINNER THAT WAS NEVER EATEN, AND OF A SUPPER THAT WAS.



THE OLD MAN'S PICTURE.

THERE has already been a great deal too much said and written respecting the supposed merriment of 'Merry' Christmas. But, after all, is not the traditional jollity a little overdrawn? Are not the festive observances rather a mistake? Is the yule-log equal to the best Wallsends? Is not the wassail-bowl rather nasty? Who is there who really and truly believes in egg-flip? Are pantomimes amusing? and who stops for the harlequinade? Does the annual gathering together of other-

wise neglected relatives generally tend towards a cheerful result? Finally, is plum-pudding worth the money it costs; and would you like to have to eat it very often?

These sentiments, however, may, after all, be a few years in advance of public opinion. Some thousands may read them, and secretly approve, and outwardly object to them; for it is not generally the custom of people to say what they think, if they ever do think. It was, however, Sam Badger's custom so to do, when he could afford it.

Sam Badger's profession was the law, and he practised it in Taffy's-inn, upon a second floor, up a remarkably crooked staircase.

It was Sam Badger's opinion that Christmas was an imposition. Sam Badger was rather hard upon most things and—men, and especially hard upon sentiment; and so he right off summed-up merry Christmas in one syllable—a syllable spelt with four letters, *i. e.* B-O-S-H!

Mr. Badger was ordinarily rather busy during the festive season. The twenty-fifth of December is not only Christmas-day, but quarter-day; and on the day following, commonly called 'Boxing,' it was Mr. Badger's custom to do a good deal of selling up.

'I find as a rule,' said Mr. Badger, 'that people are uncommon backward just about this time, and I have to screw some of 'em up a little tight.'

He screwed some of them up so very tight, that they were, so to speak, screwed up for evermore, never to be unscrewed in this world; and some of them cursed Mr. Badger in their nakedness and misery with much vehemence.

Mr. Badger was, as the reader of the foregoing stories is aware, the late Mr. White's legal adviser. For a year or two previous to Black White's death he had carried on the old man's business according to his own judgment, and without interruption, and he had generally put on the screw where it was possible.

This pressure had not in all cases resulted in pecuniary benefit to Mr. White; for a good many defaulters had gone bankrupt on Mr. Badger's hands, and some had died. But let us hope that he was not altogether without reward, and that he had made his little pickings.

But one day, as we have seen, this Black White died, and left a will behind him, in which he testified his gratitude to his solicitor with some unnecessary verbosity, accompanied by a very small legacy.

Also, and this was the most provoking part of the business, the payment of this same small legacy was entirely dependent upon Mr. Badger's seeing that the other provisions of this peculiar document were properly carried out. It was Mr. Badger upon whom devolved the arduous duty of hunting-up the addresses of the relatives of old White, who had dined with him on that day his son left the house for ever, and of sending to each a formal invitation to attend at six o'clock P.M. precisely on the 31st January 1869.

Yet in spite of the trouble he was put to, the business was not altogether uncongenial to Mr. Badger.

'I shall keep them up to the mark,' said he to himself; 'I shall wait till the clock strikes six, and

not a moment longer. I'll take precious good care that any one who is behind time (of course there will be several) doesn't get a blessed penny. I don't know that it will put anything particular into my pocket, but it will be some sort of consolation to know somebody else is in a bad way.'

He wrote the letters therefore, smiling grimly as he did so, and chuckled as he dropped the little packets into the post-office box.

The letters were directed to :

MRS. EARNSHAW.
SILAS TOPLADY, Esq.
TODGER PHIPSON, Esq.
MONSIEUR BERNHARD.
JOHN WADDILOVE, Esq.
JOSIAH GANDY, Esq.
RICHARD DARELL, Esq.
MISS WITHERSLEIGH.
MASTER WELCH.

'There's a whole month to wait,' he thought. 'Perhaps some of them may die before the time's up. Perhaps some of them are in difficulties, and keeping their addresses dark, so that perhaps the letters won't reach them. That won't be a bad lark. How awful savage they'd be to think they missed the chance! Look here, Watkins' (this to the clerkling in attendance), 'you're a witness to the posting of these letters. I wonder whether any of them will think they're writs? I wish I'd made the envelopes look a little bit more formidable; they might have refused to take 'em in.'

Towards the close of the month Mr. Badger got almost feverish in his anxiety. He several times said to himself, 'I wish it was six o'clock P.M. on the 31st January, that I could bang-to the door in one of those hungry beggars' faces.'

By the month's end, Mr. White's affairs were all to be wound-up and finally done for; and Mr. Badger from that time would cease to take

any active part in the selling up and grinding down of those poor unfortunates who had figured on Black White's bulky ledgers. But, dear heart, what a life he led them in these last days of office !

Many times the last two weeks badgered debtors scowled evilly at him from dark entries as he trudged past, and teeth were set and fists clenched at his approach. Some people might almost have thought he ran some personal risk among the slums and alleys where he was the cause of so much misery ; but oppressed Englishmen ordinarily do little else but threaten ; and so, though they talked big, they broke no bones ; and Mr. Badger sold them up, and went upon his way rejoicing.

Throughout the merry Christmas time he had been 'giving pepper,' as he playfully put it, to the 'back'ard uns ;' he had 'docked their pudding for them.'

'There's some of 'em,' he said with a chuckle, 'will have to eat their horse-radish without the beef, when I've done with 'em.'

Until the old man's death it had always been imagined that he (Black White) was the ferocious some one in the background who would listen to no terms ; but now that he was dead, this enthusiastic agent was harder and more unrelenting than ever Black White was said to have been.

It seems droll enough that Mr. Badger should have worked so very hard to make himself unpopular ; for, to tell the truth, he was honest enough withal, and pilfered only very sparingly—his little commissions, as he called them—odd half-crowns, crowns, and half-sovereigns, to recompense him for his time and trouble in inducing Black White to hold over.

Since then, during this past year, he has set up on his own account very harmlessly in the wine-trade,

and has come to a melancholy conclusion in Basinghall-street.

It must have been the smallness of his own legacy that made him so spiteful ; and he made up his mind, that if any unhappy legatee did not conform to the strict letter of the agreement, that person should not have a penny of the money. He grew more spiteful still as the day approached, and paid irritating visits to the old woman in charge of the house, which, he pretended, he thought was not being taken proper care of.

He was obliged to call, he would have made her believe, to make quite sure that the place was in proper order to receive the company. Had Mr. Badger had his own way, he would have provided an empty room and a solitary tallow-candle for the reception of the guests ; but the old man's will said that there should be a sumptuous dinner provided, and that the old wine in the cellar should be placed upon the table. During his last days on earth it is probable that old White thought some of his poor relations had acted badly towards him, and that this liberality on his part would cut them to the quick.

During his lifetime he had been called eccentric, and even mad ; and had he left all his property, to the exclusion of his other relatives, to the orphan-girl to whom he had given shelter, it is very probable that great efforts would have been made to overthrow the will.

He knew this perhaps. At any rate, there were a dozen persons at least all equally interested in proving that, when he left his money to be divided amongst them, he was in perfect possession of his senses.

Mr. Badger sometimes saw this orphan-girl when he visited the old house, and carried home with him the not unpleasant recollection of

a pale and wistful little face peering out from a doorway in the background—a face which was very pretty, but very sad; for its owner had seen a great deal of trouble in her short life. And on his way homewards Mr. Badger sometimes did a little scrap of very easy mental arithmetic, the result of which was 1 and 1 make 2.

Arriving at home, Mr. Badger would occasionally take a meditative view of his blazing Silkstone, and add up imaginary sums among the glowing embers. At such a time it would appear quite plainly to Mr. Badger, that if the orphan's share were added to his, the two sums together would, thus amalgamated, make a larger sum than each made separately.

But then, how was that desirable result to be arrived at? Mr. Badger could only see one way, but that one way presented difficulties. Looked upon as a commercial enterprise, matrimony was worthy of serious attention, he was willing to allow, but it was a branch of commerce which required great preliminary outlay.

Perhaps also a special aptitude for the business was necessary. There were manuals published at a reasonable price. Suppose he went in for sixpennyworth, and learnt up all the necessary rules and regulations.

One day he even stopped in front of a shop in the Strand, and turned sixpence over and over again in his trousers-pocket—but he did not spend it.

'It's no good wasting my money,' he said to himself by way of excuse for his stinginess; 'I'll leave it to chance. Yes, decidedly I'll leave it to chance, and see what turns up.'

Unfortunately, however, he was a good deal occupied during the next week by private affairs, and was compelled to neglect the matrimonial project. Meanwhile time

was passing, and the day fixed for the meeting of the legatees was close at hand.

'The whole thing is so confoundedly unbusiness-like,' he argued; 'I'm sure it's bad enough to give the beggars the money, without wasting a meal over them. I could hardly have thought such a thing of old White, if he had been in his right senses; but he got very maudlin towards the last. If he hadn't, he wouldn't have acted as he did about that niece of his. However, it's an ill wind, etcetera, as the proverb says.'

Other persons besides Mr. Badger the solicitor were waiting impatiently for the appointed day, and the arrival of Mr. White's relations. The two women who lived all by themselves in the gloomy riverside house spent many hours in vain speculation, regarding the probable number of visitors at this strange dinner-party.

Where were they all? Were some upon the road thither even then? How far would some have to travel? Where was he who should have had all—who, according to the curious wording of the will, would have all even now, if he came in time to claim it? Was there any chance of his doing so? Did he know that he ought to be there? Had he been written to?

One day they asked Mr. Badger the question.

'I should rather think he hadn't,' said the legal gentleman. 'If he don't find it out of his own accord, he must take the consequences.'

'Perhaps,' said the housekeeper, 'he doesn't even know that his father's dead.'

'Perhaps not; but that's his fault again. I've nothing to do with what he knows or what he doesn't. I've my instructions; and if I act up to them, that's all I can be asked to do, isn't it?'

'I suppose so.'

‘I suppose so too.’

And the lawyer departed, having made this reply, which, according to his way of looking at it, met the circumstances of the case to a nicety.

‘But he’s a hard old nail,’ the housekeeper said, when the door was closed between them; ‘and if I saw him walking along, and a chimney-pot likely to come down upon the top of him, it isn’t me that would put myself much out of the way to run across the street and tell him to take care.’

It wanted about ten days now of the appointed day, and active preparations for the reception of the visitors were in progress. ‘There must be no unnecessary expense,’ Mr. Badger had stipulated, and he had even hinted at first that a fire in the dining-room would not be wanted. Later on, he made a great stand against sixpennyworth of holly, which, in the end, the housekeeper supplied at her own expense.

It was such a dull life in the lonely old house, the bustle of preparation was quite enlivening, and was entered into with such spirit, that the rooms were ready nearly a week before they were wanted. Then, the work done, came a kind of reaction, in which the time seemed to hang even more tediously than before upon the watchers’ hands.

Therefore, sometimes at night, the weather not being very severe, the young girl and her companion would ramble down the deserted piece of garden-ground out into a piece of waste land lying close to the river, where no one was very likely to interfere with them.

From here, by a flight of steps, they could reach the unfinished works of the Embankment, and thence gaze down upon the sluggish waters creeping noiselessly past. Creeping on, the young girl thought, towards the sea which separated them from those strange

foreign countries it was supposed the scapegrace Dick had gone to—where perhaps at that very time he lay a beggar, perhaps even on the point of death, with no friend to help him, no one to tell him to bear up and be of good heart, for that wealth was in his reach, if he would rouse himself and make an effort to reach home.

How many poor creatures, however, are thus perishing within sight of land—within easy walking distance of peace and plenty—just outside the castle-gates, their weak cries for succour drowned in the boisterous sounds of mirth of those merry-making within!

One night, when taking their usual promenade, the girl noticed the solitary figure of a man, half-sitting, half-crouching upon an unfinished wall of the Embankment, and called her companion’s attention to him.

‘It’s a beggar, I daresay,’ replied the other. ‘If I’d got a halfpenny, I should give it him; I generally do, though I’m told they’re most of them nothing but swindlers, and ride in their own carriages after their work’s done; still one might make a mistake some time or other, and refuse the wrong one; and I don’t care much if I never come to miss the money myself more than I do at the time.’

The girl had not any halfpence either; and they passed on after a brief pause. As they returned in about an hour’s time, the silent figure still occupied the same place, motionless as before. When they had gone by, the girl hung back, and hurrying swiftly towards the spot, opening her purse by the way, held out her hand, in which a bright shilling glittered in the moonlight.

The man looked up at her approach. He had a young face, but pale and haggard, and wore a slight moustache. As the moon-

light fell upon him she noticed that he was tolerably well-dressed, not ragged as she had imagined at first, and hastily withdrawing her hand, stammered some indistinct words of apology.

The young man rose and stared at her silently, seeming not at first to comprehend the meaning of the little scene.

'I—I am sure, I beg your pardon; I thought at first—I—I beg your pardon.'

He caught sight of the shilling now, and smiled somewhat bitterly.

'I am much obliged to you; but I am not quite that—very nearly, but not quite.'

'I did not intend to hurt your feelings, sir. It is so dark, and I could not see distinctly; and I—I was afraid you were going—'

And she looked towards the water. He looked towards the water also, and then back at her wistfully, and before she could withdraw it, pressed her hand within his.

'God bless you, my dear!' he said; 'I may do so some time, but not to-night. God bless you. I don't want any money. See here' (striking his pocket), 'I have some yet; enough to last me very well—till something turns up.'

She hurried away all in a tremble and a flutter; but for some reason, best known to herself, did not describe the circumstances of this curious interview to her companion, and in a few minutes they were safe indoors again.

That night, however, and many times afterwards when she was alone, the vision of that white haggard face rose up before her; and she could not help asking herself whether the time had arrived yet—whether he had tried everything, and had given up hope, and had gone back to the waterside, to the place where she had seen him—and had *the time come* at last?

The time was wearing away

now very fast indeed, and at length the eventful day arrived when the relatives from all parts of the world were expected.

One o'clock P.M.: The house-keeper, who had been up and stirring since daybreak, deep in the culinary arrangements, assisted by a talented staff improvised from somewhere round the corner.

Two o'clock: Operations still in progress.

Three: Ditto.

Four: Enticing odours pervading the establishment.

Five: Still more enticing odours.

5.20: Dinner ready to serve at any moment.

5.30: Rat-tat-a-tat-tat!

Mr. Badger with a blue bag containing documents, who wanted to know if anybody had come.

'No one yet, sir,' said the house-keeper.

'No one? Bless me! They're late though, don't you think?'

'It wants half-an-hour yet, sir.'

'Not by my watch—twenty-four minutes at the outside. I shall give them no grace, I can tell them.'

Rat-tat-a-tat-tat!

An elderly lady—very silent and solemn, but with a certain aristocratic and not altogether ungraceful style about her—who gave her name as Mrs. Earnshaw.

5.47: Rat-tat! Not a postman, as might be supposed, but an elderly gentleman with a dreamy look about his face.

'What name, sir?'

'Eh?'

'What name?'

'O, Davis, Chadbright, Shuttleworth, Goodchap, and Co.—I mean Waddilove.'

'Will you walk in, sir?'

'Hullo!'

Another old gentleman—an old gentleman in a suit of clothes which could never have belonged to him.

'My name's Toplady,' he said; 'I've come about the legacy.'

'Will you walk upstairs, sir?'

Five minutes' pause. A loud ring at the bell, then rap-a-tap-tap! Then voices on the doorstep; and when the door was opened a momentary pause, while several guests courteously gave way to each other. A French gentleman, who entered bare-headed; and with him his wife, a shabby-genteel sort of lady, rather faded and washed-out in general effect, but yet as sprightly as circumstances would allow of. Besides these, a dashing young lady, with a certain determination in her cast of countenance, as of a lady who was accustomed to command and to be obeyed. The first two, Monsieur and Madame Bernhard; the latter, Mrs. Todger Phipson.

Before the housekeeper had had time to close the door, there came a spare middle-aged person, giving the name of Withersleigh—not Mrs. Brown's friend, who had called earlier and met with her great disappointment, but the Miss Withersleigh who was a cousin of old White's. Then a cab drove up, and a very well-dressed gentleman, with light hair, and a colourless face, and a long tawny moustache, presented himself. This was Mr. Richard Darell.

When the door had been closed about a minute, there came a sharp short knock, which, being replied to, proved to be that of a red-haired railway official, who wanted to know if he were all right in leaving there 'this 'ere young gem'leman of the name of Welch, from Mr. Tusher's?'

'Quite right,' replied Mr. Badger impatiently.—'And now it's time to serve the dinner, and we won't wait another moment.'

But while he was speaking there came another knock, of a very resolute character, accompanied by

a violent jerk at the bell; and before Mr. Badger had had time to give an order, the door opened, and Mrs. and Mr. Gandy (Mrs. Gandy first) bustled into the hall, quite out of breath with the exertions they had made to keep their appointment; for they had kept it, mind you, as, luckily for them, the clock they had heard strike six when they were in the lane was three minutes fast.

'Well, that's all!' said Mr. Badger savagely. 'If it were the Queen of England herself, she shouldn't come in now.'

The door was closed after this, and the housekeeper hurried off to see to the serving of the dinner; while Mr. Badger, with a remarkable want of cordiality, did the honours upstairs. They were to dine in the room where old White had been wont to entertain his Christmas company in times past. At one end of the apartment hung the old man's picture covered by a curtain, which presently Mr. Waddilove drew aside, to gaze upon the features of the deceased. It was a very bad likeness of Black White, and might have been done in a revengeful mood by some debtor whom he had treated with more than usual cruelty.

'That's the old screw,' said Waddilove. 'Just as I remember him ten years ago, when he came down to the City one day about some business. I never came here, as I didn't care about his company. As hard-hearted an old rascal as ever lived.'

'Harder,' said Mr. Toplady; and the greater part of the company chorused this sentiment.

But there was one exception. A young girl, a stranger to the rest, rose with a flushed face, and with much childish earnestness, half crying as she spoke, protested against these adverse criticisms.

'You should not talk so of him

now that he is dead,' said the girl. 'You should not talk so here, now. I wonder you are not ashamed to do so. He was not hard-hearted to my father or to me when we were very poor and in great distress, and I—I don't think you—you ought to.'

But the young girl grew somewhat confused when she had got thus far, and finished her speech a little lamely; seemingly wondering, when she had sat down again, how she had ever dared to stand up and speak.

'The young lady is quite chivalrous in Mr. White's cause,' said Miss Withersleigh with a little simper.

And pretty Mrs. Phipson Todger tossed her head contemptuously; but the well-dressed languid gentleman with the tawny moustache put in a word of expostulation.

'By Jove!' he said; 'I don't know, you know; but, by Jove! as the old fellow's left his money, and stood a dinner—'

And here the first part of the dinner made its appearance in the shape of a tureen of soup, and the company hastened to take their places round the table.

'We're all here, I think,' said Mr. Badger, counting the heads, 'with the exception of Mr. Phipson. And I see we're an odd number.'

Mrs. Gandy, at that moment seating herself, sprang up again with a scream.

'What's the matter?' asked Mr. Gandy rather impatiently. 'For goodness' sake, my dear, be reasonable, if you can, for once in your life.'

Mr. Gandy had had his sufferings that day, and as yet he had not quite forgotten them. But Mrs. Gandy would not be reasonable, and would not sit down again—for some time, indeed, would not give any fuller explanation than—

'It's thirteen—don't you see it's thirteen?—and whenever that happens, one dies before the year's out!'

'What's thirteen?' asked Mr. Badger savagely; and the rest of the company echoed the question.

Restored somewhat to her ordinary state of composure by the timely intervention of a glass of sherry, Mrs. Gandy pointed out that the number of persons at table was thirteen, and that such a state of things was invariably followed by a fatality; wherefore no argument or inducement would prevail upon her to sit down again.

'And it is all the fault of that husband of yours, ma'am,' she said to Mrs. Todger Phipson; 'and he ought to be ashamed of himself, and you may tell him I said so.'

'I am not generally superstitious,' said Mrs. Earnshaw, who had also risen, 'but I should not like to make one of thirteen!'

'I know of a case only last Christmas-day,' said Miss Withersleigh, 'where a lady was going to take her seat, just as Mrs. Gandy was, and suddenly found out that she was making the thirteenth. She therefore insisted on having her dinner alone in another room, and within six months she was a dead woman!'

'What, although she didn't make the thirteenth?' he of the tawny moustache asked, with a smile.

'That doesn't matter at all,' said Miss Withersleigh; 'she ought to have left the house at once.'

'The only way out of the present difficulty that I can see,' said Mr. Badger, coolly removing the lid of the tureen, 'is, for the lady who has found it out now to do what the other lady ought to have done.'

'Indeed I sha'n't,' said Mrs. Gandy; 'and as to its always being fatal to the person who finds it out, that's

nonsense, for I've heard of a case where all the thirteen died within the year.'

'This is becoming serious,' said Mr. Toplady; 'and, after some recent experiences of mine, I don't half like it.'

'But what's to be done?' asked Mr. Waddilove, sharpening his knife.

'And the soup's growing cold,' said the young gentleman from Mr. Tusher's.

Suddenly an idea struck Madame Bernhard's French husband, and Madame Bernhard's French husband smote his own head, and uttered an exclamation.

'We have in France,' he said, 'a custom which is almost obsolete. Once upon a time, before we got over our superstitions, as we have since got over other things, large and little—monarchies, revolutions, and priestcraft—we had among us certain well-behaved and presentable sort of fellows, whose trade it was to go out and dine in cases of emergency where the unlucky thirteen found themselves collected together. They sat at home all in readiness every evening, and came at a moment's notice, with a pleasant demeanour and a profoundly empty stomach. We called them Fourteenths, or Quatorzièmes.'

'But we don't have such kickshaw notions over here, sir,' said Mr. Badger; 'and if you don't eat the dinner as you are, you must leave it alone.'

'No, no,' said Mrs. Earnshaw; 'can anybody suggest anything?'

'Having up the cook.'

'Going out and fetching some one.'

'I have it!' cried Madame Bernhard's French husband; 'it is quite providential. Within a stone's-throw of here, close to Charing-cross, there is a young man, an Englishman, whose acquaintance I made in Paris, who acted as fourteenth on that

very occasion. Say the word, and I fetch him.'

'Decidedly not,' said Mr. Badger.

'Decidedly yes,' said everybody else.

'It's the only thing that can save your life, ma'am,' said Miss Withersleigh to Mrs. Gandy.

'Good gracious, mercy me!' said Mrs. Gandy, and took another glass of sherry.

'If you will allow me,' said Monsieur Bernhard, 'I will not keep you waiting five minutes.' And before any farther remark could be made, he had run downstairs, and next moment was running down the lane.

The person of whom he had spoken was living, sure enough, at the top of a house in a narrow lane running out of Cockspur-street. He was a good-looking but rather haggard, and undoubtedly threadbare gentleman, with a hungry look about him. So far his aptitude for the proposed occupation was evident.

'Have you had dinner?' asked Monsieur Bernhard.

'Not for a day or two,' replied the threadbare gentleman.

'You are the man I want, then. Come with me.'

'Where?'

'Never mind.'

'What to do?'

'Eat.'

'That's my affair. I'll be at your service in one moment, if you will only wait while I change.'

'Change what? You must come as you are—there is not a moment to lose.'

There was a cab waiting at the door, and they jumped in. It was a very dark night, and the young man could not have seen where they were going, even if he had felt curious, but he didn't. Putting himself, therefore, altogether into Monsieur Bernhard's hands, he suffered himself to be taken down the

crooked lane, and through the gate, across the yard, through the front door, and up the stairs, right into the room where the guests were assembled, before he realised the situation; and then—

‘Dick White himself, by all that’s infernal!’ gasped Samuel Badger.

‘My own dear Master Dick!’ cried the housekeeper in the same breath; ‘and I always said he would come back again, and claim his own!’

The rest of the company said nothing, but all looked very much astonished, and some pulled very long faces. Mr. Badger got his blue bag, dragged out a large legal document, and began to search its contents with a sort of frenzied eagerness. Others crowded round him presently, and asked a multitude of questions.

Had Dick White forfeited his right to the property by not being present at six o’clock?

No, he hadn’t. There was to

be no distribution of money that day. The dinner only was to take place. If Dick had not made his appearance before the distribution, he would have received nothing; but unfortunately (for everybody but Dick) the wording of the will was very plain upon this point. Richard White was in good time, and the money was his.

‘Where’s that Frenchman?’ cried Mrs. Gandy. ‘Let me get at him!’

‘Where’s that confounded old fool who found out we were thirteen?’ said Mr. Badger. ‘I think I shall do her a mischief if you don’t hold me back!’

‘Shall I serve the dinner?’ asked the housekeeper, half an hour later; but nobody had got any appetite, unless indeed it might have been the young gentleman from Tusher’s, and he did not count. He therefore dined on a crust, and cried a good deal, feeling generally very empty and disappointed.

THE EPILOGUE,

IN WHICH WHAT REMAINED OF THE DINNER WAS SERVED UP WARM
FOR SUPPER.

WHEN the clock struck ten, the supper was served.

There had, however, been a good deal of talk before this, as you may suppose. There had also been one or two quarrels. Several persons had risen indignantly and said good-night, and sat down again. Some of the ladies had said some very spiteful things indeed.

And what did Dick White say?

Well, Dick White said this:

‘I can’t be expected to give up the fortune altogether that I have so providentially fallen into; that’s not in human nature. But it’s such a godsend to me—I was so awfully

hard-up, you have no notion—I can afford to be tolerably generous. Therefore I shall give every one the legacy which my father would have given if I had not run away, or had turned up sooner. And now, as I am very hungry, and I am sure you must be too, I vote we sit down to supper.’

That *was* a supper!

There are doubtless extant the records of other suppers—champagne suppers; little suppers, as the French call them; hot suppers, of great domestic import; tripe suppers, vulgar but succulent; but there never was a supper before in which

every one of the persons concerned ate half as much with half the relish.

However, it is but slow work, after all, to read of eating and drinking. Besides, if you are hungry, it is tantalising; and if you are the contrary, it is disgusting. Therefore please imagine—or don't imagine, if it doesn't please you—a supper extraordinary, both for quality and quantity; and then imagine it over, and everybody on their way home rejoicing, in spite of the first momentary disappointment.

And now it seems to the writer of this strange history that nearly all that can be said has been, except that even now the story seems very incomplete, because the reader will naturally want to know what became of every one when the supper was over.

Well, in that case, suppose he gives you a few particulars, to which, if he adds a detail or two about which he is not quite certain, you will pardon him, he is sure.

Mrs. Earnshaw has recovered a large portion of the property she lost through the frauds of her vagabond relation, and is living very happily down at a quiet country spot in Devonshire.

Mr. Toplady's health is perfectly restored, but he has somehow managed to purchase an annuity on the strength of his constitution being almost broken up. I believe the old rascal will live for the next twenty years. It will be a dead loss to the company.

There has been a dreadful mortality among the Mantawleys. Mrs. Todger Phipson is dead; so is Blanche. If Todger Phipson could only make his mind up, and it were legal, I really believe Lena would not say no.

Things commercially, despite the bad times everybody talks about, have gone pretty well with Madame Bernhard's French husband. That

poor creature he met on the Alps has recovered his reason, and things are going tolerably well with him; for his employer, on account of past services, bears him no malice for his serious loss.

A dreadful rumour reaches us from Bermondsey. Mr. Waddilove's name and address have been discovered by the person he met in the City church. He is threatened with an action for breach of promise of marriage.

In future, on all matters of business, please consult Mr. Gandy. Mrs. Gandy has retired from active service. Mr. Gandy saves money by this arrangement, and things go on pretty well, considering.

'Which you might have knocked me down with a feather-bed, as the sayin' is,' Mrs. Brown observed the other day, 'when I came to hear of 'Melia's disappointment; though for that matter, I must say as 'Melia—than whom as a personal friend, and we must never say no harm of them behind their backs, the more so if happening to be absent at the same time, which it's with the lady—it's that lady she was spoke to about by Mrs. Padwick—at a fine salary, and treated like a perfect lady herself, tea and sugar and such-like found with, if anything, profuseness.'

As to *the* Miss Withersleigh—the right one—(not Mrs. Brown's Miss Withersleigh, but the other)—she has played so small a part in this little drama, the reader probably does not feel much interested with respect to her ultimate fate. Yet it is to be hoped that he will sleep no worse for knowing that she also got over her troubles, whatever they might have been, and lived happy ever afterwards.

Mr. Darell, the man with the tawny moustache, has paid his debts, and is now in a government office. He would have married a certain person, only—she had a few days

previously married one of the stage carpenters! Such is life, my good friends—at the Royal Pandemonium.

Young Welch's father has not come back yet, but young Welch is still at Tusher's. Old Tusher is still jolly ill with the gout, and has made his will; and isn't young Welch mentioned in it? O, not at all, by no means. As for the victuals, they are, if possible, better than ever.

And the fourteenth person, and the dead man's niece?

* * * * *

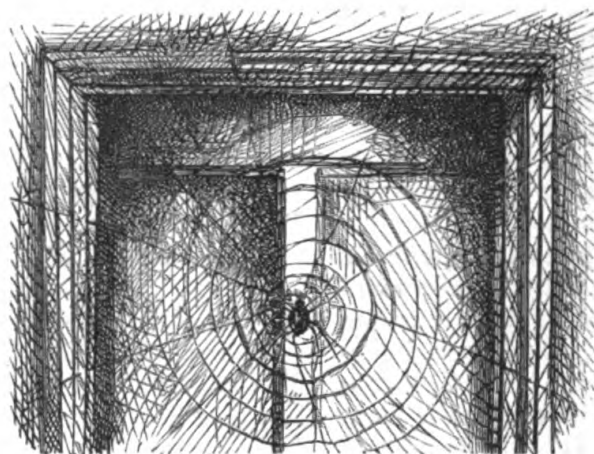
What a world this is! We are all brothers and sisters, friends and acquaintances, or the friends of

friends, or the acquaintances of acquaintances. We are all for ever passing and repassing one another in the crowded ways of life!

Of course, long ago, the reader knew that that forlorn stranger sitting alone upon the Thames Embankment was no other than young Dick White, about whom his cousin had so often wondered, for whom she had so long waited.

Of course you know now that HE and SHE—

Why, even while I write I hear the marriage-bells a-jingling; and whilst they clatter merrily in the cold frosty air, allow me to wish all this fair company 'A merry Christmas and a happy New Year!'



THE END.

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